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PROSPECT PETE, of the Boy Brigade; or, The Young Outlaw Hunters.

BY OLL COOMES,

AUTHOR OF "EAGLE KIT," "SILVER STAR," "SCAR-FACE SAUL," "SURE SHOT SETH," "ROLLO, THE BOY RANGER," ETC.



THEY SAT SILENTLY IN THEIR SADDLES WATCHING IN TRIUMPH THE DESPERATE BOY, PROSPECT PETE, RIDING TO A HORRIBLE DEATH.

Prospect Pete, OF THE BOY BRIGADE;

OR,

The Young Outlaw Hunters.

A STORY OF THE LOST LODE.

BY OLL COOMES,

AUTHOR OF "VAGABOND JOE," "THE DUMB
SPY," "ANTELOPE ABE," "KEEN-KNIFE,"
"LASSO JACK," ETC., ETC.

THE PROLOGUE.

It is a summer day. The sun has just risen above the bristling peaks and hills. A soft breeze drifts up the great canyon, stirring the feathery pines into a gentle murmur. The hills are resonant with the voices of the rosy morn. Bright-eyed birds are twittering in the bushes, and laving their wings in the golden sunshine. But nature is no more joyful—no happier than the spirits of the six men wending their way eastward through the hills. They are men in the prime and youthful vigor of manhood. Their faces are flushed with the light of inward joy. They are gold-seekers.

In the depths of the great frowning hills they have found the repository of what promises immense treasure, and it is this which gladdens their hearts. But they are trespassers—they are upon Indian territory, and with their secret locked in their breasts, they have turned their faces homeward to wait—to wait the few short months that will yet be required for the formal opening, by the Government, of the Black Hills country to the gold-hunter.

For weeks and months has this little party braved the dangers and undergone the hardships of first explorers; but they now feel that the reward of a fortune awaits them.

Daniel Wynne is the eldest of the six. Barton Gregory is the youngest. He is twenty. He is a tall, handsome boy, whose keen, dark eyes are ever on the alert for dangers.

Barton Gregory leads the way through the hills. They plod on for hours through the winding canyons and defiles. Suddenly Barton stops short and throws up his hand.

"What, Barton?" inquires a comrade.

"Whizz!" and something cuts through the air near the speaker's ear and strikes a pine.

Barton points toward the tree in the trunk of which all see the quivering shaft of an arrow.

"Boys, Indians are after us," the young guide announces, calmly.

Scarcely has he made this declaration, when a yell that seems to issue from the throats of a hundred fiends bursts upon the air.

"Run, comrades! Run for the cave!" shouts Barton, leading the way across the canyon to the left.

The miners all run for their lives, for, out from behind rock and tree and shadow, leap scores of painted Sioux warriors, with unearthly yells. Showers of deadly arrows fall around the fugitives, but they reach the cavern unharmed. The savages pursue them to the very entrance, but are there met by a deadly fire from the revolvers of the miners, and are forced back with fearful loss. But they take shelter where they can watch the mouth of the cavern and avenge the death of their fallen braves.

"Boys," says young Barton, when the excitement of the moment is over, "we are doomed."

"No, no, Barton!" cries Daniel Wynne, whose mind reverted to a wife and child, waiting and watching for him far over the distant prairies; "we can escape when darkness comes—we must escape, Barton."

"Well, I hope so, Daniel; but these savages are relentless devils, and their blood is up now."

The miners' faces have changed now. A dark cloud has settled upon their brows. They confer in silence. They watch with tireless eyes.

The day wears slowly away. The evening shadows are gathering. The miners prepare for flight under cover of the night. They have already eaten their supper of dried meat. They have examined their weapons.

The time for action comes. Like shadows the six men approach the cavern entrance. They are ready to plunge out. Every nerve is strung to its highest tension. All is dark and silent out in the canyon. The fugitives stop for a moment on the threshold of the cavern, when they are startled by the raining of arrows around them from well-strung bows.

With a feeling of bitter disappointment the miners fall back. It is death to venture out.

Fear and despondency fills each breast. The voices of the six are husky in the gloom of the cavern—under their impending fate.

Hours go by, and finally they renew their attempt at flight, but are met at the mouth of the cavern by the lynx-eyed foe and forced back into what may be a living tomb.

"Boys, nothing save a miracle will ever save us," Barton Gregory insists.

No one disputes with him, but Wynne is hopeful. His wife and child are ever before him.

"If we are to be butchered here," he finally remarks, "perhaps it would be well to leave some record of our fate. Perhaps, if it should fall into the Indians' hands, curiosity would lead them to preserve it until it reached some friendly eye. If left in this cavern perhaps some white man may happen this way and find it. A cavern like this is sure to be explored by the first gold-hunter, traveler or geologist that comes this way."

"Perhaps it would be well," said a comrade.

Wynne takes a map from his pocket and unfolds it. In the light of a pine fagot he writes upon the reverse side of the map with a pencil. He writes of the danger that threatened them, and of the mine he has discovered. He draws a rude map of the country in which they are surrounded. He locates the cavern and he locates the gold-mine—appending a written key by which the mine may be found. He appeals to the finder to send the map to his wife whose address he attaches. Then he wraps the map in a strip of his buckskin shirt and places it in a hole in the wall where it could not be seen by a casual observer, but could be easily found by an explorer.

"Should any of you escape and I fall," he says to his comrades, "break the news to my poor wife and child, and tell them of this record, and perhaps they may have an opportunity to get possession of it. You see, comrades, I have a presentiment that I am to die here in these lonely hills."

Each promises to comply with his request, should he escape.

For four days are those miners cooped up in that dismal cavern. Thirst and starvation are beginning to vie with the savages for the lives of the besieged, and the worst must come.

The night of the fifth day is fixed upon at last for a dash for life and freedom. Wynne makes an entry to that effect in his record. With many strange misgivings they watched the shadows of night gathering in and about the mouth of the cavern.

When the break is made, every man is to take care of himself. This is deemed the only hopeful chance of escape. Should they become separated, they are to meet at a given point twenty miles east: at the Fairy's Spring.

As the moment for the ordeal approaches, the six friends shake hands with words of parting. Then brave Barton Gregory leads the way. They dash from the cavern out into the darkness of the canyon. A fiendish yell rises upon the night—hangs for a moment upon the air and then goes trailing away through the dismal hills.

Silence deep and profound settles down over the face of hill and valley.

The night wears away. The morning sun breaks over the hill and plain. The Fairy's Spring flashes and foams in the golden light. The pines murmur in soft cadence, and the birds twitter in glee. But suddenly there comes a silence. The birds cease their songs and flutter away in affright, for out from among the alders comes a wild, haggard form—a human figure—a man with a hatless head—a bleeding, torn face.

The wretched being pauses and gazes around him with a wild, frenzied look.

The cascade seems to hush its voice in very pity. The old sun, whose face is never hidden from scenes of blood and death, floats behind a cloud as if to conceal the ghastly object from his gaze. The pines moan in sadness.

"Oh, my God!" cries the bleeding, wounded man, "not one, not one is here!"

Then he staggers on to the spring and as he bends over the water to slake his thirst, he starts at his own figure reflected in the limpid depths. A moan escapes his lips. He dips some water in his hands and moistens his parched lips. He drinks some of the cooling liquid. He seems refreshed. He sits down by the spring as if to wait and watch.

At every sound he starts like a hunted deer.

The hours wear on. Finally he kneels down by the spring and washes the blood from his face.

Heavens! it is the boy, Barton Gregory!

Of the six, he alone ever reaches the Fairy's Spring.

Of the six, he alone lives to carry the sad news of the massacre to waiting friends at home.

CHAPTER I.

PROSPECT PETE.

The time was midday and the place within the shadows of the great mountains of the West.

At the foot of a little cascade that leaped with a musical roar and in ribbons of foam from a rocky ledge above, five horsemen were halted. They were soldiers. They were in the uniform of Uncle Sam, and well armed and equipped. Their faces were flushed with excitement—their clothes covered with dust. Their horses showed signs of hard riding.

The party had halted at the cascade to slake their burning thirst and rest their animals.

They had been there but a few minutes when their ears were greeted by the sound of some one whistling a sprightly lay.

The soldiers started to their feet.

The sound appeared to be approaching. It came from up the great canyon in which they were halted.

A minute or two later a figure appeared in sight.

It was the figure of a boy who came swinging himself along in a careless, reckless way, as only a boy could—his hat in one hand and his long, frowsy hair tumbling about his head and face in the cool breeze drifting up the defile. He could not have been over eighteen years of age and was even small for that age. He was dressed in a sort of a rakish suit that corresponded with the expression of his twinkling eyes and handsome face. From the dust and dirt upon his clothes, face and hands, the soldiers concluded he must have recently come out of a mine; and yet they knew it was many miles to the nearest mine and fully thirty to Deadwood.

At sight of the soldiers the boy manifested no little surprise, and, evidently, pleased by the discovery of the blue coats, he pushed straight up to them and in a free and easy manner saluted them.

Returning his salutation, Captain Gillhooly advanced and taking the boy's extended hand asked:

"My boy, where do you hail from?"

"Foremost from Deadwood," replied the boy, "and rearmostly I'm from over in the hills most any-where."

"What's your name?"

"Prospect Pete."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Gillhooly; "I've heard of Prospect Pete before but never knew why you were so called."

"They call me Prospect because I'm eternally and everlastin'ly prospectin' for a new lay and never findin' it—yes, I'll take that back; I did find one once that panned out scads o' rabbits, but a pack of hellionated scoundrels came along and jumped my claim and bounced me on the grounds that a minor couldn't hold a claim, even if he did chaw tobakker and put a bullet home every crack. But, captain, their ill-gotten gains didn't avail them much, for Dashin' Dan, the Boy Outlaw, came down upon 'em like an avalanche and cleaned 'em out boots and breeches. It served 'em right, too, for they'd no business a-bouncin' a poor boy that never had a father or mother, nor as what didn't know sin from sunshine. But I'm gittin' my eyes open, captain, and if I keep on till I'm fifty I think I'll know more'n I do about men, even if I don't strike a boneancy. I've been dreamin' these long, long months that there's a nest o' yellow rabbits in these hills and I'm goin' to find 'em if it takes five years, but as I'm still a minor I won't dare say a word 'bout it if I find a rich lead till I'm twenty-one, for fear some old eagle 'll jump the fish-hawk and gobble his prey."

"What are you doing here?" asked the captain.

"Come for a drink," he replied, evasively, and advancing, he made a cup of his hands, dipped up some water and drank it. "That's glorious drink, captain," he continued; "beats bottled pizen all out of kilter—it's decidedly gorgeous."

"Then you're a temperance youth," observed Gillhooly.

"Bet your boots on that, Cap; you don't git any serpent-eggs into my brain to hatch out jim-jams and rattle-snakes like as was the case with old Nick Bell."

"You are sensible, my boy; just stick to that resolution and you'll come out a man yet. But, I say, Pete, have you seen any horsemen go up this way lately?"

"Nary solitary hossman," replied the boy.

"We have been in swift pursuit of a party of outlaws—supposed to be Dashing Dan's—for two days, and had the boys' horses been able to hold out with mine, we'd have overhauled him this morning. The young dare-devil dodged us in the heavy fog that prevailed, and believing he was headed toward the hills, hereaways, we came on in hopes of striking him or his trail again; but up to this time we have been unsuccessful."

"That Boy Outlaw's a slippery young cuss, captain," said Pete, "and nothin' but a bullet 'll ever stop him. I see'd him do a trick once that'd make any honest boy blush. He played it onto the sheriff who war considered some punkins on road-agents and the shoot. I'd hearn of jist sich a trick bein' played once afore on some feller, so it wa'n't original with Dan, but I never believed the story and didn't believe it could be done till I see'd it done with my own eyes."

"What did he do?" inquired Gillhooly, who had become greatly pleased with the honest, outspoken nature of the boy.

"Wal, sir," Pete began, "there war about a hundred men standin' around discussin' a raid that Dashin' Dan was supposed to have made, and makin' ready to go out on a grand hunt for him. The sheriff had his hoss standin' by him all saddled and bridled up just like yours, captain, is now, when a young, modest-looking miner in the crowd marched up to the side of the hoss, *this way*," and Pete advanced to the side of Gillhooly's blooded little Bashaw stud as if to illustrate the story he was telling—"and," he then went on, "he took hold of the pommel of the sheriff's saddle *that way*, and vaulted into the saddle *this way*," and suiting the action to the word, Pete leaped nimbly into the captain's saddle, "and," continued the boy, "sinking his roweled heels into the poor horse's sides *that way*, dashed away *this way*—good-day, gentlemen!"

The horse leaped forward with a fierce snort as the boy's heels were dug into his quivering sides. The soldier sprang forward and endeavored to seize him by the bits, but again the young miner dug his heels into the horse's sides, and the next moment Prospect Pete was flying like the wind up the canyon on the back of Captain Gillhooly's horse.

"Hold him in! hold him in!" shouted the captain, following up at a run—believing the frightened horse was running away with the reckless youth.

But a moment later the boy turned his face, waved his hat back to the soldiers, and then disappeared around the spur of a ridge putting out into the pass.

"What the devil does that mean?" the captain asked, stopping short and turning to his men.

"I'll tell you, captain," said one of the soldiers, "it means that that boy who represents himself as Prospect Pete—that temperate youth with the innocent smile of a young angel—air of heaven-born simplicity and maidenly modesty—that gay lad so frank and outspoken, is him whom we have been in pursuit of these two days. I'll stake my life on it that it is Dashing Dan, the Young Outlaw!"

CHAPTER II.

A WILD AND DARING RIDE.

Up the canyon at a wild, breakneck speed fled the boy on the little, spirited steed—on with lightning rapidity apast tree and rock—the beating of the horse's iron-shod hoofs starting a hundred ringing echoes around him. The look upon his face had changed from that of joy and pleasure to one of serious thought as though his conscience was already upbraiding him for his deception and wrong. But be that as it may, he made no attempt to undo that wrong. On the contrary, he urged on the horse, whose speed seemed to increase at every bound. Mile after mile glided swiftly behind, and yet the boy seemed restless, impatient.

The shadows of the approaching eve were beginning to gather in the deep defiles, but away up on the mountain peaks the sun still shone like a beacon fire.

A faint breeze stirred the mountain pines and fanned the hot, sweltering face of the excited boy.

With his eyes ever before him filled with burning eagerness he galloped on.

Suddenly, as he swept around a bend in his course, he came in sight of a score of horsemen

ered they were white men in disguise—road-agents and outlaws.

The boy was upon them before his presence was discovered.

Like the wind he swept past them.

"Halt! halt!" shouted the freebooters, and their shouts were accompanied by the bark of revolvers.

The boy, however, was beyond reach of their bullets, and seeing this they vaulted into their saddles and started in swift pursuit.

On and on at a furious speed went the pursuers and pursued. In and out of the shadows of the canyon they flitted like birds darting in and out of the clouds of heaven. Five miles had been passed since the chase began when a great peak rising high into the clouds appeared before them. It was Eagle Cliff. It reared its pine-crested head high above the surrounding hills.

Prospect Pete glanced up at its glowing summit, then back at his pursuers. The distance to the base of the cliff was short—the distance back to the outlaws was shorter.

"I must reach the summit of Eagle Cliff!" the boy exclaimed to himself, his eyes flashing with a desperate determination—his voice firm and resolute.

From its base half-way up, Eagle Cliff seemed almost perpendicular. At a glance it would seem a difficult task to climb it on foot—totally impossible to ascend it upon horseback. But Prospect Pete was one of those who never stopped to consider the possibility of any thing, and with a determination born of the spirit of reckless daring, he spoke sharply to his horse and headed up the rocky, seamed and ragged sides of the mountain.

The outlaws were amazed and horrified by this unexpected movement. They galloped on and drew rein at the foot of the mountain and gazed up at the mad youth in silent, expectant awe. Not one of them dismounted—not one of them could take his eyes off the young dare-devil, for every moment they expected to see horse and rider come rolling down at their feet, broken, bleeding masses of flesh. To scale that acclivity on horseback they believed was beyond earthly power, and they sat silently in their saddles watching in triumph the desperate boy riding to a horrible death.

The face of the acclivity was rough and stony. A *cimaron* path wound and twisted like a serpent's track up the heights and along this Prospect Pete guided his horse. Up and up like the nimble-footed chamois, the noble animal climbed—leaping and bounding at times from rock to ledge—now clinging for a moment a quivering heap on the edge of a great yielding rock, as if about to roll backward—then lunging forward—planting his feet on firmer ground—his sharp, iron-shod hoofs striking fire from the rocks at every bound, and at every leap the hot breath streamed from his nostrils, while flakes of white foam from his sides floated down upon the air or fell quivering upon the rocks.

Like a young centaur, Prospect Pete sat the noble little steed, urging him on with words of encouragement.

An avalanche of dirt and stones were sent crashing down the cliff from under the horse's hoofs.

Birds that had sought shelter among the pockets and rocks on the mountain side started from their roosts on whistling wings, while a thousand bats and nocturnal birds shot through the air with wild, imprecations.

Five hundred yards up from the base of the mountain the acclivity broke into a series of benches, and from there on the ascent was gradual. Before the outlaws were aware of it—so certain were they of Pete's destruction—the daring boy had reached the first of this series—was safe even beyond the reach of bullets.

Then it was that wild curses of baffled rage rose on the air, and the freebooters became almost frantic with fury when they saw the boy draw rein and coolly and deliberately wave his hand to them.

In a moment half of them were out of the saddle and clambering up the acclivity in pursuit of the boy. But Pete felt no fear now. He reached the summit of Eagle Cliff with ease and dispatch, and galloped quietly along the ridge through the gathering shadows of the evening.

A few miles further on the cheery glow of a camp-fire burst upon his view, and the end of his wild ride was reached. A minute later he drew up in the camp of a party of men and women. His presence was hailed with surprise

wrong?" asked Tom Doran, the hunter-guide who had conducted the party to Eagle Cliff.

"Yes," replied Pete, "you're in danger! Throw out guards and see that every gun and pistol's in tune!"

The party gathered around the boy breathless with suspense and fear.

"To-day," continued Pete, "I was concealed in a vine-clad tree in the hills waitin' for a friend, when who should come ridin' down the gorge but twenty Ingins as I supposed. They halted right under me, and then I see'd they were white men in disguise, or most of 'em anyhow. They held a long talk which I heard. It was about a pleasure party encamped on Eagle Cliff. They said a rich man named Gordon had come from the East out here with a handsome, beloved darter who was an invalid, and whom it was believed the mountain air would help. The little game of the outlaws was to attack your camp when all was quiet, carry off Miss Gordon and the other ladies and hold them for ransom, which I considered meant death to the ladies. Before the villains got away from under that tree they discovered my presence, and knowin' I'd overheard their plans they made haste to silence me, but the instant I see'd I war diskivered I dropped like a meteor from that tree astride o' one o' their horses, and away I went like a shot; but they opened fire on me and wounded the hoss so that I had to quit the saddle and take it coyote-fashion 'mong the hills. By chance I got a hold of this noble little hoss—run the gantlet o' that same band o' outlaws and Ingins, rode up the spur of Eagle Cliff and came direct to your camp."

"Great God, boy! do you mean to tell me you rode up the cliff from the south?" exclaimed Doran.

"I do—just sailed right up in a gorgeous style."

"Heavens, Pete! you are mad!"

"Mad! I should say I was mad—mad enough to go back and whip, lone-handed, every outlaw and red-skin in the hills. Yes, I'm b'lin' mad, Tom."

"God bless you, brave boy," said Mr. Gordon; "will you not dismount and accept the hospitality of our camp?"

"I can't, ginerel, I must be movin'; there's more work for me."

"May Heaven speed you, Pete," the man replied.

"Thank you," responded the young miner; "with Tom Doran to look after you, I know the outlaws'll meet 'ith a warm reception. In fact, they may not come at all, since I beat 'em here. I may be back again to-night, and I may not—good-night, folks, to you all."

"Good-night," answered the party, as the daring youth ambled away northward through the deepening shadows of that summer night.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAPPER TRAPPED.

CAPTAIN GILLHOOPLY and his men were completely dumfounded. That the boy giving his name as Prospect Pete was Dashing Dan, the Young Outlaw, they had not a doubt. The captain had always prided himself on his skill as an Indian-fighter and as an adept in circumventing outlaws and road-agents; but to be outwitted by a boy was truly exasperating to the dashing young cavalryman, who with four picked men had entered the hills with the avowed purpose of hunting down the outlaws.

Dashing Dan's band had been organized under very peculiar circumstances. Some time previous a band of outlaws under one Captain Argus Eye, as he was called, had been operating with impunity on the stage and express companies, as well as the citizens of the mining camp of Deadwood. The military and Vigilants had exhausted every effort to break up and capture the band, but in vain. At length a few leading men in Deadwood conceived a novel plan of circumventing Captain Argus. There was a young mountaineer named Dashing Dan in the camp who was perfectly familiar with the hills—brave, fearless and daring. One night these men summoned Dan before them and made the proposition to him that he raise a band and take to the mountains ostensibly as an outlaw. It was arranged that he make frequent raids upon the stage and express—also upon those of the mine-owners who were in the secret of the mock organization. They were to have a stipulated salary—all property taken to be secretly returned. The object in this was to ingratiate Dashing Dan's band into favor and brotherhood with that of Captain Argus.

ing Dan soon gained a notoriety that threw Captain Argus in the shade, as it were. The stage was robbed as was arranged and the effects taken quietly returned. Several of the miners were waylaid and robbed and their treasure restored. But finally there was a change in the programme. Robberies, accredited to Dashing Dan, were committed and the treasure was not returned. Even life was taken on one or two occasions, and those long-headed, leading citizens of the famous mining-camp had the startling fact staring them in the face that the decoy-band they had organized and equipped with such high hopes had become so infatuated with their life as to become robbers in reality, and like Captain Kidd, turn against those in whose employ they had enlisted.

Captain Gillhooly had heard of this blunder on the part of those leading citizens, and their inability to check the evil they had innocently set in operation in their midst. He had also heard that a boy, called Prospect Pete, was one of the scouts, in the pay of the Vigilants, kept on the look-out for the outlaws, and since he had never seen either Dashing Dan or the young scout, he readily conceived how easily the young outlaw, personating Prospect Pete, had deceived him and robbed him of his valuable horse. At least, this was the captain's view of the situation now.

"Perhaps," said one of his men, "Peter, himself, has turned outlaw on his own hook."

"Such a thing is possible though hardly probable. Prospect Pete, from what I have heard of him, is incapable of wrong doing. He has a sister, they tell me—an invalid sister to whom he is devotedly attached, and upon him her support depends. But whoever that boy may be, I'll see that he never deceives me again—Ah! hark!"

The rattle of wheels and the sound of hooved feet broke upon the soldier's ears.

A moment later the stage bound for Deadwood swept into view down the pass.

"Boys, one of you take the stage and let me have your horse to pursue that boy," said Gillhooly.

"All right, captain," said Sergeant Clayton.

The captain mounted the sergeant's horse and, followed by the three mounted friends, galloped away.

Sergeant Clayton hailed the stage and took passage for Deadwood.

Gillhooly did not expect to catch the boy for he knew he was mounted on the fastest horse in the hills; however, he had hopes the young rascal would stop along the way.

The four galloped along until they came to where the canyon forked. An examination of the ground told that the black Bashaw had taken the right-hand fork which led away into the labyrinths of the mountains.

Pushing on at a rapid pace the captain and his friends were suddenly startled by a sharp command to halt.

The soldiers drew rein, when forth from the dense thicket on either side of the canyon came a score of masked men with cocked revolvers leveled full upon them.

"Dismount and surrender!" commanded the leader in a peremptory tone.

Gillhooly and his men were not cowards, but they knew full well that resistance or an attempt to escape in the very teeth of such fearful odds would be certain death.

"On what conditions?" asked the young officer coolly, calmly.

"Unconditional, of course."

The soldiers dismounted.

"Drop your barkin'-irons," commanded the outlaw.

The soldiers unbuckled their belts and dropped them to the ground at their feet.

"Now, gentlemen," said the outlaw leader advancing closer, "we never take human life when we can help it. But these horses we will take—Uncle Sam can stand it. We will also detain you, captain, for ransom. Uncle Samuel can well afford to spend some money for the liberation of so good and efficient officer as you. You soldiers can go free and inform the powers that be, that whenever five thousand dollars are deposited in that hole in this rock right over there and no questions asked, then will Captain Gillhooly be restored to his command. We care nothing for the captain and his efficiency as an Indian and outlaw hunter—it's rabbits—cash, we're after. Captain, you will remount your horse—soldiers you can go whither you will."

After some parleying Gillhooly mounted and was firmly bound hand and foot thereon. Then

diers' horses and taking the officer in charge rode away up the canyon. Where the other outlaws went the captain knew not.

By this time the shadows of night were gathering, and evidently having a long distance to travel, the three outlaws hurried forward with their captive at a lively gait. But they had not been long on the way when they discovered a horseman was following. Who he was and what he was up to they could not tell, and through fear of danger two of the outlaws fell back some distance to guard the rear, while the other with Gillhooly rode on, revolver in hand.

Half an hour had elapsed when the quick, sharp bark of a revolver was heard behind, and was followed by several more shots in quick succession.

Gillhooly's escort evinced some uneasiness. He frequently glanced back over his shoulder as if in doubt as to what had been the result of that firing.

Night had long since set in, but the moon was shining with a mellow, dreamy radiance.

The canyon was crooked as a serpent's trail, and the outlaw and his prisoner were first in the shadows and then in the moonlight. Clumps of bushes grew along the way, and at times great rocks and boulders forced them close in against the perpendicular walls of the canyon.

Suddenly a horseman dashed up from behind them from out the lurking shadows. Quick as he could the outlaw turned his horse. He knew not whether the horseman was friend or foe. The absence of his friends and that firing he had heard made him uneasy and restless. To his horror, he found it was not a friend but a foe—a boy mounted upon a black horse—a boy with a dirt-begrimed face, a hatless head and a shock of tangled, disheveled hair—who held a cocked revolver leveled full upon his—the outlaw's—breast!

"Don't move a muscle, old robber, or I'll lit her spin!" came in a quick, firm tone from the lips of the boy; "drop that revolver."

The outlaw made a motion as if to obey, but, quickly throwing up the muzzle of his weapon, attempted to send a ball through the boy's brain; but the lad was on the alert—his revolver rung out, and with a gurgling moan, a convulsive shudder, the road agent rolled a lifeless mass to the earth.

"There," exclaimed the boy, dashing alongside Captain Gillhooly and cutting the officer's bonds. "I couldn't help killin' him—I warned him, and now his spirit's gone to meet those of his two friends left behind—I say, captain, good-evening."

Captain Gillhooly gazed down into the face of his deliverer, and to his utmost surprise beheld Prospect Pete there before him—seated astride of his own little Bashaw steed—gazing up into his face with a look of wild, triumphant joy upon his begrimed, boyish countenance!

CHAPTER IV.

OLD OKLAHOMA.

It was broad daylight, and the mail-coach from Cheyenne, due at Deadwood about dusk, was stopped when within ten miles of the latter place, by a band of masked road-agents who, covering the brave old driver with a dozen revolvers, threatened instant death if he attempted to move until ordered so to do.

"All right," said the driver, who, more than once, had held the lines while covered with outlaw revolvers, "go your length, gentlemen-of-the-road, and precious little wealth you'll get out of this deal."

True enough, aside from the mail, but a single passenger was aboard of the coach, and this was an elderly-looking man, in a battered tile and seedy clothes, with a thin, cadaverous face, a little, dull-gray eye, and an uncommonly large mouth, surrounded by a short stubby beard.

The road-agents did not disturb the mail, but proceeded to interview the old passenger. The leader of the gang, a tall, athletic fellow with but one eye and a face almost as red as blood, opened the door of the coach and presented a cocked revolver at the old man's head, saying:

"Say, pilgrim, shed your valuables and live."

The old passenger started with a look of blank horror upon his comical face.

"Wisdom of Solomon!" burst from his lips, "you are ole Cap Argus Eye, the road-agent, aren't you? You're the ole Bedouin of the Black Hills, I see. That game eye gives you away, you sinner."

"Did you not understand me?" roared the outlaw captain; "hand over your wealth at once, sir!"

ger. "Arn't you in the wrong boat? Do I look like a man of wealth and luxury? Do I look like a bloated aristocrat? Do I look like the Inca of Peru? Verily, I'm thinkin' you're mistaken in your man, Captain Argus Eye. My name is John Oklahoma—Old Oklahoma from Wichita, and I'm a lawyer and counselor-at-law by perfession, and am on my way to Deadwood to start a shop in the interest of—of legal jurisprudence and—and Old Oklahoma."

"I don't care an ounce of dirt who nor what you are; it's wealth I'm after," replied the dread scourge of the road.

"Christ—topher! don't I tell you I'm not a national bank? nor a mint? nor a great monetarian? I'm just goin' for wealth. You act as though I was a hull ship from Spain—a Kooonor diamond. There's my valise—you can take it and purloin it, and if you find anything more valuable in it than a pair o' suspenders, an empty bottle and a copy o' the Blue laws o' Connecticut you can shoot me where I repose. Oh, I tell ye what, ye've struck a bad job this time—I ain't even got a pistol to blow your brains out with. I'm as innocent of wealth as a Piute Ingin is of beauty—but I'm honest—honest as the days are long—I'm Old Honesty himself. But, captain, when I'm riled up I'm a holy sporter on the fight. Jist heft that fist—isn't she a cedar maul? Couldn't she disturb the equilibrium of a behemoth? Well, I'm sorry, captain, that you're disappointed. I wish I could draw you a check for a thousand or two, but true as the gospel of St. Bartholomew, I give the stage company my last dollar and the saloon superintendent my last cent at Cheyenne. I'm undone, captain—feenancially bu'sted, but I'm full of snap, and purpose to make a raise in business when I git to Deadwood, or business'll raise me. No, things are not always what they seem, Cap; I may look like a wealthy corporation, but I'm only a poor but virtuous lawyer from Wichita."

"Old man," said the road-agent, fixing his blazing eye on the old passenger, "I believe you're deceiving me; get out here."

"All right, sir," said the old man, jumping out of the coach, and stretching out his long, lank form, and yawning drowsily, "pillage me—reconnoiter me—strip me—see that my clothes are not padded with greenbacks or Government bonds—turn me inside out—upside down—give me an emetic—don't leave in doubt as to whether I'm loaded down with wealth or not—make sure I'm not a bonenancy king—a Bank of California with a vault full of gold certificates. Rummage the stage there—see that the cushions of the old hearse ar'n't padded with valuable documents—look well about it—it's your duty to look after such things."

Captain Argus searched the old man thoroughly but found nothing of value. He then went through the coach with no better result.

"Curse such a poverty-stricken outfit," stormed the road-agent. "I've a notion to shoot the whole thing to death."

"Don't you do it, captain," expostulated the comical old passenger, "for I'm not ready to be russeled off into eternity just because I ar'n't a whole syndicate. Poverty's honest though infernally inconvenient at times. I wish I was able and could, without feeling it, plank you down a trunk line railroad well equipped with silver engines and palace cars with seats stuffed with greenbacks and government bonds. But I can't do it to-day—I can't even present you with an ounce ball of lead, but I've hopes of the future, though my makin' a raise depends on the misfortunes of others—that's the way with the Blackstonian disciples and—"

"Oh, go to Purgatory with your clatter," interrupted Argus Eye savagely; "and remember that if I ever catch you on this road again without at least a dollar, I'll put a bullet through your ungainly carcass."

"Thank you, captain," said the old man climbing back into the coach; "it's good in you to be so kind—good-day, captain, and may you never strike another as badly bursted institution as we are again."

With an oath the captain of road-agents mounted his horse and followed by his men rode away. The stage-driver spoke to his horses and the vehicle moved on while Old Oklahoma, with a grim smile of satisfaction, settled back into his seat and whistled softly to himself.

In the course of an hour or two the coach rolled into Deadwood and stopped at the principal hotel. Old Oklahoma alighted from the vehicle, traveling-bag in hand, and gazed around him with that inquiring look of a stranger in a strange place.

A young man of perhaps twenty stepped up

"Jack, old pard, how d'ye do?"

"Sword of Damocles!" burst from the old man's lips as he grasped the boy's hand, "Harry Reynolds—Little Hurricane—I'm dyin' glad to see ye! How's yer health? how's the Boy Brigade?"

"All on the go, Jack," replied young Reynolds, "but, come, our cabin's but a mile from here, and the boys are waitin'."

"Lead off, Harry, and I'll follow; it seems an age since we met on the plains o' Dakota, and yit it's only two short years. Have ye struck it rich yet, Harry?"

"No; we've been prospecting every day since we came, and *think* now, we have struck a rich lode, though there's nothing sure."

In the course of a few minutes the two arrived at a long low cabin, the home of the Boy Brigade. It was dark by this time, yet the cabin was lit up, and as Harry Reynolds conducted the old man inside the door, a shout from seven pairs of stout lungs greeted him and the next moment he was set upon by the Brigade wild with joy; and never was there a more happy reunion of friends than was that of that old man and those young miners.

After all had become quiet and the gentleman from Wichita had been permitted to take a seat at the supper table with his old comrades, Harry Reynolds said:

"We've been expecting you for a week, Jack."

"I'd 'a' been here sooner but for one thing: I struck a detective of the Express Company at Cheyenne who told me of the royal deviltry of Argus Eye and Dashing Dan, and he wanted me to help him out. I couldn't refuse an old friend, and so I stopped. Now Gwynne told me about the origin of Dashing Dan's band and I made up my mind there was a Zululander in the woodpile. First, I wanted to see Captain Argus Eye, and so Gwynne started the report that a rich old millionaire, who was going to build a double track railroad to Deadwood from Cheyenne, would be over the road to this place inside of a week by a private coach. Of course the road-agents heard of it, and to-day the stage on which I, Jack Drew, war comin' in on war stopped by old Argus Eye. Ho! ho! ho! the idea of takin' me for a millionaire—a railroad—a solid old corporation, war the best joke o' the season. I gave my name as Old Oklahoma, to the road-agents, and if we boys go out together to-night—and I want to go over to the "Stock Exchange"—just call me pet names—anything but Jack Drew."

"All right, old pard," replied Harry.

After supper the boy miners accompanied Old Jack over to the "Stock Exchange"—a place where none of them had ever been before. The "Stock Exchange" was the name of a prominent saloon or, in other words, gambling house. It had been styled a "respectable institution," of the kind, and "a credit to any mining town." Perhaps this came of the fact that its proprietor was one of the leading men of the camp. Colonel Clement Bland not only owned the Exchange but also held large interests in two or three paying mines. He was a Southern gentleman by birth and education, of fine personal appearance and pleasant address.

Few were in the saloon when our friends entered, for as yet it was quite early. Seating themselves around a table Old Jack ordered cigars for those that smoked, and for awhile the party was comparatively quiet.

Presently Colonel Bland entered the room, walked with a stately tread down the hall—bowing and smiling to all that caught his eyes. As he passed near our friends his eye caught the steady gaze of Old Jack, and he started slightly, bowed and passed on into a private room.

"Old pard," said Harry Reynolds, "the colonel was surprised to see us innocents here, wasn't he?"

"And that was Colonel Bland, eh?" replied Jack; "dashed fine lookin' feller. They say he's captain of a Vigilance Committee."

"Yes, organized among his own employees," replied Harry.

By this time the saloon was pretty well filled with men, and the clinking of glasses, rattling of dice and shuffling of cards told that business at the Stock Exchange was in full blast.

Old Jack sat quietly searching and studying the different faces around him.

A noisy fellow in the crowd with the air and bravado of a bully was offering to bet five to one that there were at least three of Dashing Dan's outlaws in Deadwood that holy minute; but he could find no takers. Finally the fellow found himself in the vicinity of our friends, and with a rather insulting tone he said to Jack:

"Old handsome, may be as what you'd like to chance a little cash on my proposition, as you look like a moneyed man?"

Old Jack rose to his feet, glared into the man's eyes for a moment, and then demanded:

"Do you know who I be?"

"Some rich old cuss from Shecaggo," was the rejoinder.

"Now, sir," said Old Jack, in tones that attracted every ear, "if you're anxious to bet, and have the dust, and want to bet on outlaws, I'll bet you one thousand dollars that *Captain Argus Eye, the Outlaw Chief is in this house!*"

And as he spoke, Old Jack drew from his bosom a roll of bills and shook them in the bully's face.

"Stand yer ground, Jake! stand up to him!" shouted a dozen voices from different parts of the room.

The crowd had now gathered around the two men wild with excitement. The proposition of the odd-looking old stranger had fell like a thunderbolt on the ears of the crowd, and involuntarily every man in the room began to search the face of those around him, for the single, reputed Argus Eye of the dreaded road-agent.

Jake Hume, the loud-mouthed bully, was fairly startled by the old stranger's offer. For a moment he was unable to speak, but the yells of those around him, urging him to stand his ground, braced up his courage, and he replied:

"Old handsome, yer tryin' the game of 'bluff'."

"I'm actin' on the square, sir," rejoined Old Jack; "kiver that one thousand dollars and if I don't produce Argus Eye, the money's yours."

A scene of the wildest confusion reigned. Hume hemmed and hawed, but there was no backing down now. The crowd was so eager to get hold of the outlaw chief—the proposition of the mysterious old stranger had been made in such a blunt and honest manner—that for him—Hume—to have thrown up after so much blow and bluster would have been to have brought the vengeance of the excited crowd down upon him. A dozen men, through fear that Hume's want of courage lay in his purse, offered to help him make up the thousand dollars, but even this "backing" did not seem to dispel his reluctance. However, the money was counted out amid the wildest excitement and placed in the hands of Judge Stockton.

"All ready," said the judge, "point out your man, stranger."

A deep silence fell upon the crowd as the tall form of Old Jack Drew was seen moving through the excited throng as if in search of his man.

But in the midst of this silence, every lamp in the room suddenly went out, and all was wrapped in blinding gloom. Then followed a rush of feet, cries of "Help! help!" from a stifled receding voice, dull blows, the crack of a pistol, and then all became blended in one wild and horrible confusion. The doors and windows were burst open and the crowd, like stampeded cattle, went pouring out, shouting "Murder! treachery!"

In a minute's time the Stock Exchange was emptied of its crowd, then the lights were again lit.

The Boy Miners, led by Harry Reynolds, were first to re-enter. Their old friend, Jack Drew, was missing. Judge Stockton with the stakes in his hand followed the boys. They were met by Colonel Bland who was pale and excited.

There was blood on the floor.

Slowly the crowd filed back into the saloon. Eagerly the Boy Brigade waited and watched for their friend; but he came not. Jake Hume was also absent.

Harry Reynolds, unable to restrain his emotions longer, leaped upon a chair and shouted:

"Gentlemen, there has been foul work done here to-night! That old man has been murdered and spirited away!"

The boy was applauded by the crowd.

"Who was that old man?" asked some one.

Before Harry could speak another shouted out:

"Old Jack Drew, the famous detective!"

"Then," said Judge Stockton, "I shall hold these stakes until further developments."

This declaration was indorsed by the crowd which appeared to be unanimous in the belief that the old man had been foully dealt with, and that, too, by Captain Argus Eye's outlaw who were present *incognito*, at the time the lights were put out. At any rate his disappearance under the circumstances was involved in a mystery.

CHAPTER V.

WHO WAS HE?

TIMES had been flush in Deadwood. The greatest excitement prevailed throughout the new mines. Men that were paupers one day were wealthy the next. The stage and express companies were doing a driving business. Saloon men and gamblers were in their glory. Hotel and boarding-house keepers were overrun; and last, but not least, the road-agents and outlaws were preying upon the labor and income of all with reckless impunity.

That these robbers were a part of the population of Deadwood and adjacent camps no one had a doubt. But how were they to be sifted out and brought to justice? The camp was in its infancy—everything and everybody were running wild in the great struggle for gold. One half the people in the place were total strangers to the other half, and every day brought still others to the camp. It was in the midst of this grand rush that the mock band of road-agents was organized under Dashing Dan and sent out to circumvent Argus Eye with the result already stated in a previous chapter. Two Vigilant Committees had been organized. Colonel Clement Bland of the Stock Exchange was the captain of one of them; but the outlaws had little fear of these organizations and went right along with their plundering.

The tragedy at the Stock Exchange in which Jack Drew, the noted detective, was spirited away caused no little excitement and comment. It was a seven days' talk, and the general opinion of all was that the old man was made way with by the followers of Argus Eye and Dashing Dan present at the time of the bet.

Unlike most mining camps there were many women in Deadwood—pure, lovely and noble women. Among the fairest of the fair was a young girl of eighteen named Idyl Wynne. She had come there with her uncle, John Wynne, for she was an orphan.

John Wynne was a quiet unassuming man of forty who was content to seek for a fortune, or living at least, in the new camp by running a private boarding-house or restaurant in a quiet part of the town. But the very day he opened his house the news went abroad that John Wynne had the handsomest daughter in the camp, and this created a great curiosity in the breasts of the miners, and from that time on Wynne's restaurant had a big run.

Colonel Clement Bland was among the first to make the acquaintance of the fair and queenly Idyl, and all finally came to the conclusion that his heart had at last been pierced by Cupid's shaft, and that he would in time lead the fair maiden to the altar of wedded bliss. But still, all that could possibly be counted in his favor as against other admirers of the girl, was his wealth and gallantry, for the maiden herself showed no more preference for one than another—treating all, as was her nature, lady-like and kindly. But one night an event occurred that seemed to change the whole current of her life.

It was about nine o'clock. The boarders had all taken their suppers and retired to their lodgings. The table had been cleared away, and John Wynne and his pretty niece were seated in conversation when a man entered and asked for something to eat, apologizing for calling so late. He was dressed as a miner. His face was covered with heavy, dust-begrimed whiskers. From under his worn, slouched hat hung a mass of unkempt hair. Altogether, he was rather a rough-looking man of about thirty-five.

Idyl hurried to the kitchen to order supper for the miner, while John Wynne conducted him to the little wash-room off one end of the dining-room.

Leaving the man there to make his ablution, the proprietor put on his hat and stepped into the street.

Idyl, in returning from the kitchen, saw the door of the wash-room slightly ajar. She was in the dark, while a lamp burned brightly in the wash-room, and as she involuntarily and unthoughtedly glanced toward the partly open door, she saw the miner remove a wig from his head, and a mask of whiskers from his face—revealing a young and boyish countenance that struck her at once as being strangely wonderful.

Idyl was not an ill-bred girl, nor of an inquisitive turn of mind, but she was so surprised by her discovery that she could not resist the temptation to secretly watch the movements of the stranger through the partly-open door.

She saw that he was not over twenty years of age—that his face was smooth with clear-cut

and handsome features, while the hair on his well-shaped head was cut closely.

The maiden's heart fluttered wildly, and so deeply was she impressed by the face of the youth that she did not quit her watch until she saw him replace his wig and mask.

In the course of a few minutes supper was prepared and the stranger sat down and ate in silence, Idyl waiting on the table. When he had finished his repast he paid for the same and departed.

And from that moment Idyl Wynne felt a strange gnawing at her heart she could not account for. The face of the young stranger was ever before her, but contrary to her usual habits of confidence in her uncle, she did not disclose her discovery to him. She thought perhaps she might never see him again anyhow, and yet that very thought gave her pain.

For days she carried her secret in her breast lightly as possible and in the course of a few days the stranger, still in disguise, came back, got his supper and departed as before. And still, he came the third time, some ten days later. Idyl happened to be alone, and greeted him with a pleasant smile. He called for supper, and while seated at the table eating, he said:

"Miss Wynne, with your permission, I would like the pleasure of speaking with you."

"I grant that permission, cheerfully," she replied.

"Of course," he said by the way of preface, "you may think me very inquisitive for a stranger, but I hope you will pardon me when you learn the object I have in view."

"Indeed, sir," replied Idyl, "I have already discovered that you are not the person you appear to be."

The stranger started with great surprise.

"Miss Wynne, is it possible you have penetrated my—my—"

"No, sir, I caught a glimpse of your face in the wash-room the first time you came here."

"And have you ever mentioned the fact to any one?"

"I have not."

"Thank you, Miss Wynne; you will not regret your silence," said the man, removing his cunning mask from its place and revealing his face in all its youthful beauty; "you see by this," he went on, "that I have all confidence in you; but now what I want to ask you is, what brought you to Deadwood?"

Idyl glanced quickly and nervously at the stranger.

"I assure you," he went on, "that I will not betray your confidence, Miss Wynne. The fact is, I have seen you a dozen times within the past summer, and I must confess your face has ever been before me, and I could not resist the temptation to come here in disguise, and repeat my coming till an opportunity was offered to speak with you in private. I have seen you and your uncle, as I learn the gentleman of the house bears that relation to you, riding through the hills frequently of late as if in search of some particular spot or locality. I know you never dreamed of being watched, but I couldn't help it."

Idyl's face colored, and in a voice tinged with scorn, demanded:

"Who are you that have been watching my movements so closely?"

"My name is David Stone, and I assure you I'm your friend, and am willing and ready to prove it. Strange things occur in this country, it is true. One half the people wear false faces in order to protect themselves from the false hearts of others, and that is the case with me. By-and-by I'll tell you more. But to the subject: yesterday while passing through the hills some ten or fifteen miles north of here, I found, near the mouth of a cavern, a picture—an old daguerreotype in a leathern case, half buried in the dirt and drift of years. On examination I found it in a good state of preservation, and when I looked at the picture I would have sworn it was a picture of your own self. Here it is."

A little cry burst from Idyl's lips and taking the weather-beaten case in her trembling hands, looked at the picture.

"Oh, Mr. Stone!" she cried, "it is my mother! my poor, dear sainted mother!" and pressing the picture to her lips, she burst into tears and wept bitterly. When she again turned to young Stone, she found he had replaced his mask.

"Mr. Stone," she said, "I must visit the place where this picture was found. My father and five of his comrades were murdered there six years ago."

"Is it possible, Miss Wynne?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, father and six friends came into these hills on a prospecting tour, and were set upon by Indians and all but one murdered after a week's siege. The one that escaped came home dying of a wound received from an Indian arrow. He told us of father's death. It appears that they took refuge from the savages in a cavern where they held the foe at bay until starvation began to stare them in the face; then they made a dash for liberty and life, but all fell but the one. All however, had expected to die, and so father took a small pocket map and on the opposite side wrote a full history of their dangers and the fate that seemed to await them all. This he deposited, wrapped in a piece of buckskin, in a pocket in the walls of the cavern with the prayerful hope that it might be found and delivered to his family should he and his friends fall. Nor was this all. A secret was written upon that map. Father had found a rich lode that promised immense wealth. Of course, at that time, Deadwood was undreamed of, and without some guide it would be impossible ever to find the undeveloped mine, and so he drew a map of these hills and added a key which would enable any one in possession of it to find the treasure-spot. True, it may be that it is to-day one of those mines now yielding such immense treasure. But still, uncle John and I cannot rest until we have found that map or, are fully satisfied it is not in existence. Had the friend of father that escaped lived, he could easily have guided us to the cave and the treasure, but alas! he died a few days after he reached home. And now you, Mr. Stone, a perfect stranger to me, know my secret—what brought me to Deadwood. I knew from what father's friend told us that the scene of his death must be near this place, and now, since you bring that picture I am sure of it."

"My fair young friend," said the miner, "this confidence in me, shall be sacredly kept, and I will do all I can to aid you. Should that map be found, and your father's mine undeveloped, you may yet possess that which is yours by law of inheritance. 'Here,' he said, handing her a paper on which he had hastily sketched a rude map, 'give that to Prospect Pete, the Boy Miner whom I suppose you know, and tell him to take you to the cave near which I found the picture. He'll understand it. Tell him Dave Stone gave you the paper. The cave is about fifteen miles north of here not far from Eagle Cliff.'"

As he concluded Stone rose and bidding Idyl good-night took his departure.

He had been gone but a few minutes when her uncle entered the room in great excitement.

"Why, uncle, what's the matter? you're excited!" exclaimed Idyl.

"Yes, yes, Idyl! Dashing Dan's outlaws have been at work to-night right here in Deadwood! Several men have been robbed and two killed! The Vigilants are out! Five thousand dollars reward is offered for Dashing Dan dead or alive. Photographs of the young outlaw that were struck some time ago, are being circulated so that all may recognize the young dare-devil should they meet him. Here, I have one of the pictures. It seems impossible that so fine a looking youth could be such a daring villain!"

Idyl took the card, and as her eyes fell upon the picture a cry of horror, that seemed wrung from her very heart, burst from her lips. The card dropped from her fingers and reeling she fell to the floor in a swoon.

And there was no wonder for the photograph was the very picture of David Stone!

CHAPTER VI. VILLAINS FOILED.

WE will now take the reader to Eagle Cliff, the summit of which we have seen Prospect Pete scale at the risk of his life. The party of excursionists encamped thereon number ten including the guide, Tom Doran. Four of these were women—young ladies, and time had passed away with the joy and happiness of a picnic party for several days. The cool, mountain breeze, and the balsamic odors, the song of birds and the many beauties of nature as seen in the rugged hills, all conspired to fill the hearts of the party with ecstasy and joy. But in the midst of their enjoyment came the daring young rider with news that well-nigh created a panic, and filled the breasts of all with fear and consternation.

The party was not ignorant of the hills being infested with outlaws, but as they carried nothing of value with them, they had no fears from this source, for, such a danger as that of the outlaws carrying off captives and holding them for ransom, like Italian Bandits, had never occurred

to their minds. It was an innovation on part of the Black Hills outlaws and road-agents which had probably been suggested by the report that Francis Gordon was a man of great wealth, and that his daughter Irene was an only child upon whom he lavished all the love of a devoted father.

Mr. Gordon could scarcely believe the boy at first, but Tom Doran readily vouched for the truth and honesty of Pete, and so not a moment was lost in preparing for a defense should the outlaws attack them. While the men were all thus engaged Irene came running to her father and exclaimed:

"Father, Idyl and Dolly have not yet returned."

"What?" exclaimed the excited man, "they been gone two hours and not back yet?"

"No, they are not here; Idyl said they would return in an hour. They went out to take a walk—as Dolly said 'to prospect.'"

"Then, by heavens! they are either captives or lost!"

Tom Doran shook his head.

"I'm afraid so," he said; "if I'd 'a' known they war not in their tents I'd been lookin' after them."

"They went away very quietly—I must say secretly," continued the fair Irene, whose pale face and great blue eyes betrayed her inward emotions.

"Well," said the guide, "we dar'n't weaken our force now by sendin' a man to search for them. Them bandits may bounce us any time. Maybe the gals 'll come yet, and so I'll fire off my revolver and if they should be lost near the report will guide them."

He walked to one side and discharged his revolver in a thicket of manyanitas, and as the report thundered away through the gathering shadows of night, a voice moaned out:

"Oh Lord! I'm killed! slayed—murdered!"

The voice came from behind the clump of manyanitas.

"My God! who have I shot?" cried Doran, and together he and Mr. Gordon hurried around the bushes, and there found a man prone upon the earth writhing in mortal agony.

"Who is it?—certainly none of our party?" said Gordon.

"No; it's been a skulkin' outlaw," said Doran, with a breath of relief, "and he's got his carcass perforated for his coyotishness, and it served him right."

"Oh, merciful Redeemer!" moaned the writhing man, "I'm murdered—butchered—assassinated! and I'm as innocent as an unborn generation of angels."

"Seems to me that's queer talk for a dyin' man," said Gordon.

"Yes, rather," replied Doran, "but let's take him to a tent and see how bad he is, and also see who he is."

Four men lifted the fellow and carried him into a tent. It was dark within it. Outside four lanterns hanging from the limbs of pine trees shed their light over the green sward beneath. Two men paced the circle of the camp on guard, and the wounded man had just been deposited in the tent, when one of these was heard to halt some one in a clear, sharp tone. Leaving the wounded stranger, Doran hurried to see what it meant. He found the guard had halted two men who introduced themselves, stating they resided at Deadwood—had gone out that day on a prospecting tour and had got lost. The guide did not know them. In fact, he did not pretend to know half the people in Deadwood, for every day new recruits were added to the population of the camp. He called Mr. Gordon and said:

"These gentlemen tell me they're from Deadwood and lost, and ask the hospitality of our camp to-night. What say ye?"

"It seems impossible to refuse them when we are so greatly in need of friends, as well as they—especially since danger appears to be lurking near, and that fellow being caught lurking behind that bush is evidence that he was reconnoitering for some evil purpose, else he would have come boldly into camp like a man. Walk in, gentlemen, and we will do the very best for you we can."

The two lost prospectors followed into camp, but no sooner had the light fallen upon their faces than Gordon felt a vague mistrust rising in his breast. They had not the open, honest countenance that their manner of speech had indicated in the dark, and, with the two girls still absent from camp, the wounded man in the tent, and these two strangers in their midst, the situation looked foreboding enough indeed.

The strangers seated themselves upon a log

and took off their hats. One of the excursionists, Billy Barnwell, engaged them in conversation.

Meanwhile Doran, unobserved, elbowed Mr. Gordon aside and said, in a low tone:

"Them men will bear watchin'."

"I know it, Tom, and I don't know what we're going to do. It looks discouraging."

"Have Miss Irene and Miss Mary stay close in their tent, and let every man be warned and put on his guard for the worst. I'll call the boys aside, so's not to arouse suspicion, and put a flea in their ears. I'll also keep an eye on them two chaps, and if I see anything suspicious 'bout them, I'll settle their mush in a twinklin'. While I'm doin' this you see 'bout that wounded critter in the tent. He's quiet now and maybe's dead's Napoleon."

Doran turned aside to warn his friends, while Gordon proceeded to the tent.

In the mean time the prospectors had learned, from Billy Barnwell, that the party was in sore distress over the absence of two of their girls who had gone out for a walk, also that they were in constant fear of an attack from outlaws.

"The robbers 'll not be apt to disturb you if they know you've been warned of an intended attack," said one of the men.

"We were warned by a boy who overheard their plans, and will give them a warm reception if they come fooling around here," said Billy.

The two men exchanged glances.

"Who were the ladies that went away and have not returned?" asked one of them.

"Miss Wynne and Dolly Gray," replied Barnwell, but at the same moment he caught the eye of Doran fixed upon him with a look that startled him. He at once excused himself and stepped aside. Beyond sight of the prospectors he met the guide who said:

"Dimnition, Billy! you're talkin' too much to them fellers—they're frauds."

"Do you think so, Tom?" asked the unsuspecting young man.

"I do, though I hope I'm mistaken."

"Well, if they are I reckon I've been fool enough to furnish them all the information they wanted, and some they didn't like to hear, perhaps."

Meanwhile Mr. Gordon had entered the tent where the wounded stranger had been left. The light from the lanterns outside lit up the place with a dim, uncertain twilight, but by this he was enabled to see the dark outlines of the man—not lying prostrate, but sitting bolt upright; and before Gordon could speak the fellow said, in a low, quick tone:

"Sh! silence, stranger, and don't give me away. I'm not dead nor hurt very badly."

"Who in the wonders are you?" queried Gordon, peering closely into the man's face.

"I'm a nocturnal bird, stranger, and am not of the vulture kind, either; but them two men out there are vampires of darkness and 'll bear close watchin' for they're backed by half a score of followers. I see'd them two critters skulkin' this way and as I knew they were bent on mischief, I made up my mind to watch 'em. When they were in a clump of bushes on one side of the camp, I was concealed behind a clump on t'other side. But all to once that feller stepped out and deliberately fired at me cuttin' off the lobe of my off ear, and then I concluded it war time for me to act, for I supposed I'd been discovered and that that feller war goin' to practice on me. But as I said afore, them fellers are up to mischief."

"We have not only suspected them, but you, also," said Francis Gordon.

"Stranger, you can put your faith in God and me every time, and if I deceive you—"

"Why, then, don't you come out into the light and let us all see your face?"

"That wouldn't do, stranger, for I've got to keep my phiz muzzled for awhile. I'm not handsome, I'll admit, as Adonis Belvedere, nor persessed of any bewitching ways, but I'm a hull mule-team and a brindle dog on a fight. Here's a fist, stranger, ekel to a quartz-crusher—a tropical earthquake—a prairie tornado, and if it becomes necessary it'll do your soul good to see it gosloshin' round 'mong the mugs. Yes, stranger, put me down on your side and count me three if it comes to a fight, but you want to keep me ambushed, and then I'll turn myself loose—take the bits in my mouth and sail into the ring like a stud pony at a circus; and then by the great John Rodgers, I'll make somebody think old Pluto's whoopin' up his fires under—there, stranger! look out for breakers!"

These last words of warning were called forth

by the crack of a pistol, and the sound of excited voices a little way south of camp.

Mr. Gordon rushed out of the tent and to the scene of excitement. He was startled to find eight or ten men, entire strangers, parleying with the guard about entering camp.

The two prospectors started to their feet at sound of the pistol as though it was a preconcerted signal, and glanced quickly around them. Seeing that the men were all moving toward the point of excitement, they glided like hounds toward the tent in which Irene and Mary were seated. Reaching the structure one of them raised the flap covering the entrance and said—apparently excited:

"Come, ladies—quick! you are in danger!"

The maidens, trembling with fear, rose to their feet.

"Don't you do any sich a thing, gals," said a husky voice through a slit in the canvas behind them.

The girls started back with alarm.

The two men rushed into the tent—seized a couple of shawls and threw them over the girls' heads, stifling their cries for help. Then they lifted the trembling forms in their arms and turned and dashed out of the tent. But they were met at the door by a tall, angular form from whose shoulder a bony fist shot out and was planted, quick as a flash, between the eyes of each. As the villains went down under these terrific blows, they dropped their burdens—the half suffocated girls.

In a moment the latter had freed themselves of the shawls and were upon their feet.

"How's that, you dimmed gal-thieves?" they heard their mysterious old deliverer ask the villains, as he planted a kick in the stomach of each and curled them up gasping for breath upon the earth; and then turning to the girls he said: "Now, gals, consider yerselves free and under the protectin' wing o' the Bald Eagle o' the Big Rockies."

All this had transpired so quick—in such a brief space of time that the mind could scarcely grasp the rapidly passing events. But to the terror-stricken girls all soon became clear. They saw that the tall stranger had rescued them and that he was the same man that had been carried into the tent a few minutes before, to all appearance, seriously wounded.

Turning to the would-be abductors who lay writhing in agony and semi-consciousness, the old man took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and stooping slipped the iron bracelets upon the wrists of the villains.

By this time high words were being indulged in by those on the other side of the camp, and requesting the girls to return to their tents, he hurried off that way, exclaiming:

"Give me a hand in this fight, gentlemen, for I've just annihilated a brace o' gal-thieves!"

"Ay, hear that voice!" exclaimed one of the outlaws, for such the villains were that confronted the excursionists; "that old curse—let me shoot him down like the dog he is!"

These words were accompanied by the click of a revolver in the hand of the outlaw, but before the villain could execute his threat the fist of the old man was driven into his face and he went down as if under the blow of a thunder-bolt.

This was the signal for a general conflict. The outlaws rushed toward the old stranger intending to crush him with sheer strength, but never did men meet with such a surprise. With lightning rapidity the old man's fist crashed into face after face—never failing in doing its work until nearly every foeman lay struggling and bleeding on the earth. The old fellow had not overestimated his fighting powers to Mr. Gordon. In fact, his performance had filled the excursionists with wonder. The mysterious old man seemed possessed of superhuman powers—to bear a charmed life in the midst of danger. However, Tom Doran and his friends did not stand idle, and whenever an opportunity presented itself they put in some telling blows.

It was too dark and friends and foes were too promiscuously mixed up together to permit the use of revolvers. In fact, the outlaws made no attempt to shoot any one except that old stranger and from this it was evident that they were there simply to provoke a war of words and call the attention of the men away while those two "prospectors" kidnapped Irene and Mary. But thanks to the old man, their plans were foiled, and in few minutes the whole outlaw crowd was in full retreat with fearfully bruised and disfigured faces.

As soon as the contest had ended, Mr. Gordon turned and started for the tent in which he had left the girls. On the way he was met by Irene, who, in a few words, told him of all

that had occurred at the tent. Turning to the old man, Gordon said, when Irene had finished:

"Stranger, you have proven yourself even more than you promised. I should like to see the face of so wonderful a man in the light."

"Friend," replied the mysterious old fellow, "it won't bear the light—it's an ugly face, I assure—you must excuse me, but I do not want you to see it. I reckon, however, you see them devils war after kidnappin' your gals. They didn't intend to take life, I see, until they heard my musical voice, then they jist r'ared back on their pasterns and snorted; but I've two o' the birds out here in—"

"Sir," cried Irene, "those men rose to their feet and ran away."

"Fires of Old Pluto!" exclaimed the man, "then I'm out two pairs o' steel handcuffs."

"Ah! then you're an officer!" exclaimed Mr. Gordon.

"Them other gals of yourn," the old man replied evasively, "I'm afraid are in trouble."

"It was a great mistake in 'lowin' them to go 'way," said Doran.

"Wal, now, folks," said the old man, "you needn't fear them outlaws to-night again, nor won't need help o' any more cyclones, so I believe I'll pull out and look for them gals."

"But say, stranger, before you go won't you tell us, at least, who we're indebted to for this noble help?" called Mr. Gordon.

"To the Almighty God," came the reverent and serious reply, and then the mysterious man turned and moved away into the shadows of night, leaving the party surrounded by a vague mystery.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE CAVERN.

CAPTAIN GILLHOOLY seemed dumfounded and speechless as he gazed down into the face of his rescuer. There was no mistaking the person—it was Prospect Pete, the Boy Miner, who sat before him upon his—his captain's—horse as cool, calm and triumphant in look and voice, as though he had not, but a few hours before, boldly and deliberately stolen the officer's noble little steed from under his very eyes in broad light of noonday.

Seeing the captain's surprise and consternation, the boy slipped from his saddle to the ground, and unfastening the sword-belt around the body of the dead outlaw turned to Gillhooly and with all the pride of a conqueror swelling in his young breast said:

"Here, captain, I now return to you your hess and sword with many thanks. The bottom of this noble hess is gorgeous—I have tried it; but as to the sword, I have not had a chance to try its mettle."

"Thunder and Mars!" burst from the lips of the astonished officer, as he received back his trusty blade; "what am I to understand by this?"

"By what, captain?" Pete asked as though innocent of what the captain meant.

"Why you ran away with my horse to-day."

"Oh, I didn't, captain, the hess run away with me."

Gillhooly was completely astounded by this cool and deliberate impudence of the boy. He sat perfectly silent for a moment undecided as to whether to dismount and give him a sound thrashing or a pointed, moral lecture. But then it occurred to him that the bravery of the youth had saved him from an outlaw dungeon, and his feelings of resentment cooled down.

"And so you pretend to excuse yourself," he finally remarked, "for your conduct to-day on the ground of my horse having run away with you?"

The boy burst into a peal of laughter. He saw the captain was confused.

"Yes, Cap," he said, "and I've been thinkin' of suein' you for damages, but seein' you had a deal of trouble, too, we'll jist call it square and quits, and as we're not as safe here as if we were in Heaven we'd better be a-movin'. The outlaws are on the war-path, and they may make it interesting for us if they catch us in this canyon."

Captain Gillhooly was in a quandary. The boy had outwitted him once and he didn't know whether to trust him again or not. He was satisfied, it was true, that the youth did not belong to the outlaw band that had captured him; but as there was no alternative now the two exchanged horses and began retracing their footsteps through the canyon.

By this time the moon had shifted in the heavens so that little light fell in the defile, making their way gloomy and foreboding.

They had nearly reached the point where the outlaws had waylaid the captain when they heard the sound of hoof-strokes approaching.

"Wheel into this canyon, Cap!" exclaimed Pete, turning his horse's head and spurring into a deep, dark defile on the right, the officer following.

After traveling a mile or two they drew rein and listened. All was quiet save the "swish" of nocturnal wings above and around them.

"Cap, s'posin' we halt here till mornin' it's goin' to be all-killin' ticklish gittin' out o' here to-night."

"I'm willing to do anything," said Gillhooly half despondently.

They dismounted and concealed their horses in a pocket of the canyon, then Pete led the way to the mouth of a cavern hard by, and stopping said:

"Cap, this cave's an old bunkin' ground o' mine,

and I think we'll be perfectly secure inside o' it—d'y'e say go in?"

"Go ahead, Pete; I'll give you a chance to prove yourself a friend, for you must know that I have mistrusted you of being an infernal little rascal."

With a low, pleasant laugh Pete led the way into the cavern which became more spacious as they advanced. Finally Pete took a match from his pocket and struck it. The light flared up and pierced the gloom of the chamber, then went out.

The two seated themselves at one side when Pete said, in reply to the captain's last remark:

"I reckon you couldn't help thinkin' I war a fraud arter gittin' away with your hoss, Cap; but the fact of it is, captain, the lives of several men and two or three lovely gals depended on my reachin' Eagle Cliff within a certain time, and as that time couldn't be made by a livin' man on foot, I made up my mind to do the next best thing after I diskivered you folks at the cascade. Knowing I war a stranger I thought it would be useless to spend words tryin' to borrow a hoss of you, and so I clim the critter and lit out in a gorgeous manner for Eagle Cliff, and I made my point—beat the outlaws and saved Mr. Gordon's party—"

"Gordon, did you say, Pete?" exclaimed the captain.

"Yes, Francis Gordon—a rich gentleman from the East with a charmin', gorgeous pretty darter."

"God bless you, Pete!" replied the young officer.

"I am thankful to Heaven you took my horse. Francis Gordon is a very dear friend of mine. His daughter wrote me they would be at Deadwood by a certain time, and it was my intention to visit them before I return to the fort."

"Reckon then, Cap, you're sweet on the gentleman's darter, eh?"

"Pete, I must confess she is my affianced wife."

"Whew!" whistled Pete, "it is a lucky thing," he said, "that your little black has lightnin' in his heels and—"

The lad was here interrupted by a faint sound drifting to his ears. They listened—they heard the sound of voices near the entrance to the cave. They were low, yet the listeners could easily distinguish them as the voices of females.

"By snakes, general!" the boy exclaimed, in a low, excited tone, "there's female weemin out there and mebbey they're in need o' help."

"Perhaps, then, we'd better make a reconnoissance down that way, Pete, and inquire into the matter."

"Whist! look, captain!" suddenly exclaimed Pete.

A faint beam of light pierced the gloom. The two saw the red eye of a small pocket lantern glaring out brightly into the darkness of the cavern in one long quivering shaft, but they could not see the person carrying it, for back of it all was darkness.

The presence of the light started a medley of sounds in the cave. Birds that had sought roost there started from their perch with affright, while scores of bats flapped their ominous wings about the heads of the two watchers. Beetles and moth whirled and fluttered in the beam of light and beat themselves against the rocky wall of the cavern upon which the red rays were, ever and anon, turned.

Gillhooly and Prospect Pete crept softly along until they were enabled to press themselves into a niche in the wall where, with revolver in hand, they awaited results.

The light approached along the opposite side of the cavern. It moved slowly, but finally passed beyond our friends; and then it was that they were enabled to see, outlined against the light, two female forms. One of them wore a hat and shawl, but the one with the lantern was hatless and her form was draped in a long, dark cloak. Her hair hung loose in a flowing mass down her back.

"By the holy Pentateuch! that's a little queer," said Gillhooly in a whisper.

"Dog my cats, if I don't believe this cave's haunted, Cap. Don't you b'lieve them are spirits?" asked Pete.

"Oh, no; they're flesh and blood, but a mysterious pair."

The strange females appeared to be searching the cavern walls. Ever and anon they stopped, when the one with the lantern would thrust her disengaged, gloved hand into every little hole or pocket where she could not bring the light to bear. In this way they moved on until the upper end of the cavern was reached when they turned and followed along down toward the two mystified watchers. The latter saw at once that they would be discovered if they remained there, so rising they stole noiselessly across to the opposite side of the cave.

In a few minutes the mysterious women passed them and approached the entrance to the cavern, but they did not go out. On the contrary they turned and again started around the rocky chamber—searching the wall more closely and carefully.

Pete and the officer again crossed to the opposite side of the passage, determined to watch the movements of the women to the last. That there was some mystery connected with their presence they had not a doubt. Who the women were and from whence they came they knew not. They could not get a glimpse of their faces and only a partial outline of their forms. They could hear them speak occasionally but in the cave their voices sounded unnatural.

For fully an hour they continued their searching when, at length, she who carried the lantern withdrew her hand from a dark hole in the rock with something clasped therein. A little cry of joy escaped their lips. Then they examined closely what they had found. Suddenly a wild cry pierced through the gloom of the great vault, and clasping the object to her heart, one of the women exclaimed in a clear, distinct voice:

"Oh, Dolly, this is the paper my father left here! Oh, my poor, dead father! these are the last words he ever wrote!"

"By heavens, Cap!" whispered Pete, "that sounds like the Wynne gal over to Deadwood—Idyl Wynne. I b'lieve it's her, I do by snakes! If it is, she's the sweetest and gorgeousest gal that ever set a fellow's heart a-thumpin'. And that t'other gal she called 'Dolly.' It must be Dorothy Gray—old Sam Gray's darter, and I can tell ye she's a clipper—brave, saucy, pretty as a pink and on the shoot with any man in the hills. Why, by snakes, Cap, I'm in love heels over head with both of them gals. But I do wonder what in the deuce they've found? And just think of them gals comin' alone over here fifteen miles or more, through these hills infested with road-agents and bears and dangers—snakes! ar'n't they brave?"

Before Gillhooly could make any response they heard one of the girls say, in a tone of sadness:

"Father wrote this five or six years ago when the Indians had him and his friends cooped up in this cavern. He saw there was no hopes of escape and so he wrote this and told his companions that, should any of them escape, where he had left it and requested them to deliver the same to mother and me, or give us such information as would enable us to recover it. One of father's friends did escape mortally wounded, to die soon after he had reached our home and told us of this paper which holds a secret, Dolly—a key to the location of one of the richest lodes, as father believed, in these hills. That was before Deadwood was dreamed of. The lode had been worked but little and left in such a shape as to make one believe it was an abandoned mine. Of course, father and his friends were not prepared for developing the lode then, but started home for help and to await the action of the government in opening the lands to the miner. Before uncle John and I could make arrangements to search for father's remains and this paper, Dead wood sprung up like a magic town and father's claim may to-day be one of the paying mines now being worked. If so, I can not claim it, of course, but if it is not, I may yet, with aid of this paper, find the lode and claim it as an original discovery, and yet enjoy some of the fruits of that for which father gave his life in the prime of manhood."

"Aha! that explains the secret, captain!" whispered Pete, "that paper holds the secret to a hidden treasure."

"So it seems," responded Gillhooly thoughtfully, then he invoked further silence on his restless young companion that he might catch the rest of the women's remarks.

"But to make sure, Dolly, that this is the paper left by my father, let me open it," the speaker went on.

Dolly took the lantern, when Idyl, for she the other was, unfolded the paper. It was a map of the Western Territories on the reverse side of which was drawn a rude outline of the Black Hills country, Cheyenne being the initial point. The spot where the mine was found was indicated by a star, while below were minute instructions in writing how to find the place. But Idyl did not examine this map closely. She glanced quickly over it, and as her eyes fell upon the signature "Daniel Wynne," she exclaimed:

"Yes, this is father's, Dolly; here is his name."

Scarcely had the last word fallen from her lips when out of the blinding darkness behind, a human hand was thrust, and quick as a flash of lightning snatched the paper from Idyl's hand and disappeared.

A deathly silence—a silence of horror sealed the lips of the maidens and paralyzed their forms.

The sound of retreating footsteps fell upon their ears and broke the spell that held them motionless and silent.

A scream burst from Idyl's lips.

A little derringer in the hand of Dorothy Gray rung out in sullen tones through the cavern. But the shot was at random—without avail. The cunning thief had escaped with the paper that had cost Idyl Wynne months and years of longing and anxiety—for which she had risked her life.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLOODY CONFLICT.

PROSPECT PETE and Captain Gillhooly could remain silent no longer. They had seen Idyl robbed of the paper which but a moment before she had clasped fondly to her breast, and springing to their feet, Pete shouted:

"Halt, there, you sneakin' thief!"

But there was no answer save the rebounding echoes of his own voice and a scream from the girls.

"Easy, gals," said Pete, advancing toward the girls, "it's me and Captain Gillhooly—friends to you."

Idyl recognized Pete's voice and at once turned the rays of her lantern in the direction whence his voice came—revealing the presence of the boy and the officer.

A few words sufficed to explain the situation, when Pete, leaving the girls with the captain, glided away on the track of the villainous thief.

Gillhooly soon learned from the girls that they had not come directly from Deadwood, but from the camp of the excursion party under Mr. Gordon encamped on Eagle Cliff. They had stolen away after night-fall, and guided by the brave little Dorothy Gray, had come to the cavern to search for the paper.

"Did any one else besides yourself and uncle know

of there ever being such a paper left in this or any cavern in these hills, Miss Wynne?" the captain asked.

"Yes, one other person," replied Idyl, and the thought sent a shudder to her heart.

"Then that person is the one that snatched that paper from your hand," he declared.

Idyl made no reply, but wrung her hands in bitter distress.

The sharp bark of a revolver out in the canyon came faintly to the ears of those in the cavern.

"Thunder and Mars!" exclaimed the captain, "that little dare-devil's at work. Remain here, ladies, and I will go to his assistance."

He hurried to the mouth of the cavern, but found all as quiet as the grave. He waited and listened, but the old hills were as profound in their silence as the blinking stars in the heavens.

Finally the captain gathered up an armful of dry sticks and grass, and returning to the girls, proceeded to light a fire—not that it was needed for any other purpose than for its light to dispel the gloom of the place.

Idyl Wynne paced the cavern in restless impatience, mentally praying that Prospect Pete might return with the paper.

Dolly Gray sat down and conversed with Captain Gillhooly. She was quite young—possibly not over fifteen. She had been raised among the hills and all their dangers, the daughter of an old hunter. She was a wild romping girl, fairly worshiped for her beauty and vivacity. She feared nothing—often braving the worst dangers for the love of adventure. She knew the hills around Deadwood as well as she knew her father's cabin, and it was this knowledge of the country that induced Idyl to select her as a guide to the cavern pointed out by the rough map or directions of mysterious David Stone.

"Oh, dear!" the little girl exclaimed, as they discussed the theft of the paper, "how I do wish I'd 'a' known of that thief's presence a second sooner, and if I wouldn't have belted him good—my! I hope Pete will fix him—Pete's a staver when he gets started—he never gives up till he has to."

"Yes, yes," replied the captain, "I've had a fair example of Peter's pluck, courage and shrewdness. He's a brave and gallant boy, I must say, Miss Gray; but he is as odd as he is—"

The captain's words were here interrupted by a little cry from Idyl, and looking up he saw the girl standing with her eyes fixed upon the form of a masked stranger who had appeared from the gloom on the opposite side of the fire.

Gillhooly sprang to his feet and laid his hand on his revolver.

The masked man, drawing a repeater with his right hand, and pointing with his left toward the captain, said:

"Don't attempt to draw that weapon, soldier; to do so will be your death-warrant."

"You're an ole road-agent!" cried Dolly Gray, indignantly, "and I'll shoot your head off if you come near me."

"Girl," said the masked man, with deliberate coolness, "don't you make a little fool of yourself, or it'll make the matter all the worse for you and your friends."

"Sir, what do you want here?" demanded Gillhooly.

"Those girls, and yourself *again*, also," was the reply.

"Then you'll have a holy, sweet time taking us," the captain said, in a reckless yet determined tone.

"He can't take us!" declared Dolly, drawing her derringer.

"I'm not alone," said the man in the mask, with a wave of the hand, and then four more men emerged from the gloom of the cavern, and stopped before them.

"And, sir, I come to dispute *your* claim to these girls," said a voice from another part of the cavern, and then forth from the darkness behind the women appeared a man with a long grizzled beard and slouched hat, followed by four masked friends.

"Ha!" exclaimed the first intruder, "you are impudent, sir!"

"I can back my impudence," replied the man of the grizzled beard, "with powder and ball if need be."

"If you get these girls you'll have to fight for them," declared the first, in a firm, resolute tone.

"That we can do—we like to fight—love it, sir," was the cool reply.

"But you do not know whom you have to deal with. I am Captain Argus Eye!"

As he spoke he tore the mask from his face and, true enough, revealed the almost fiery red visage and the one glaring eye of that mountain terror. At the same time nearly half a score more men appeared from the darkness and ranged themselves in line by their leader.

A cry of horror burst from poor Idyl's lips.

Captain Gillhooly started back with amazement, while Dolly Gray, flashing a fierce look of scorn at the outlaws stood like a stone image in her tracks.

"I see," spoke up the old man at sight of this war-like array, "that you, also, Captain Argus, are counting without your host. I say, sir, these girls and that officer are *my* prisoners."

As he concluded the old man threw aside his disguise and then there stood before the astonished party a smooth-faced and handsome boy of perhaps twenty years of age!

At sight of him, a cry burst from Idyl's lips, and she threw herself at his feet imploring mercy and protection; for, in the gallant-looking youth she recognized the mysterious visitor at her uncle's restaurant, David Stone—he whose handsome face and manly bearing had won her heart's affections, and he who had delivered to her her mother's

picture on that memorable evening when her eyes first fell upon the photograph of Dashing Dan—the very image of David Stone.

At the same instant that the boy made his true self known, at least a dozen of his followers appeared through a rear entrance to the cavern, and formed in line facing Argus and his band.

"Girl!" hissed the dreaded one-eyed outlaw, "you are groveling at the feet and imploring the mercy of that heartless villain and road-agent, Dashing Dan."

Idyl started to her feet and turning with imperious dignity upon the boy, demanded:

"Is that true? Are you the Boy Outlaw, Dashing Dan?"

"Be that as it may, Miss Wynne, I am ready to die in your defense," the young man replied evasively.

"You'll have that opportunity," said Captain Argus, "and I charge you in your very teeth of being Dashing Dan."

"I haven't denied it," replied the boy.

Idyl's heart almost ceased to beat and her brain grew dizzy at these words.

Quietly every man drew his revolver.

The rival outlaw bands stood eying each other. A conflict was brewing—a bloody fight was inevitable.

The fire burned between the two lines. Captain Gillhooly and the girls were on the side of the fire next to Dashing Dan's party, which, of the two the captain decided to himself was the least.

Argus Eye was, evidently, greatly surprised at the presence of so many of Dashing Dan's force. He had assured himself of an easy victory, but when he saw the opposing force was equal to his own he was not so sanguine and blustering.

For a moment there was silence—it was the lull before the storm. Each band waited the attack of the other.

"I'll shoot the first outlaw that attempts to touch me," declared Dorothy Gray; "I don't care which band he belongs to, either; I hate all outlaws."

One of Argus Eye's men, as if in defiance to her threat, advanced a step or two with outstretched hands as if to seize her.

Quick as a flash the desperate little girl raised her hand and fired in the villain's very face. A pink spot on the white forehead told where the deadly missile had crashed into his brain. With a low moan and a spasmodic shudder the outlaw fell dead directly across the fire that lit up the cavern.

For a moment a blinding darkness pervaded the cavern. Then followed a rush of feet, a woman's scream, the "ping" of a revolver, a groan, succeeded by the quick bark of fire-arms, yells and curses, and heavy, sudden blows.

The conflict had begun, and the awful din seemed to shake the old mountain to its very center.

And while the rival outlaws fought like rival fiends in the darkness of the Inferno, Captain Gillhooly seized each of the girls by an arm and hurried them to one side and away through the cavern and out into the open air beyond the reach of danger.

"It's a Kilkenny fight, girls," said the captain, "and let them fight it out, while we, the bone of the conflict, mount and fly for safety."

In a few minutes the three mounted, Idyl and Dolly on Pete's horse, and moving down the defile.

The sound of the subterranean conflict died away behind them, though in fancy those death-groans still rung in their ears.

In a few minutes the three reached the main canyon and turned southward. They rode along at a walk for the way was rough and dark and full of dangerous pitfalls.

By a change in their course the moon shone into the defile before them, checkering their way with light and shadow.

Suddenly the fugitives heard the clatter of hoofs behind them coming down the canyon.

Captain Gillhooly wheeled his horse into the shadows of an overhanging rock, and was followed by his fair companions who bore themselves with remarkable courage.

A minute later a horseman swept past them.

In the moonlight the three recognized him as Dashing Dan, the Boy Outlaw.

"Oh, thank Heaven! he was not slain!" burst involuntarily from Idyl Wynne's lips.

"Child," said the young officer, as he rode on, "I see you are deeply interested in that young outlaw."

"Captain," she replied, "I do not believe he is an outlaw in spirit—I cannot believe it."

"Idyl Wynne," said the captain, seriously, "banish all thoughts of that boy from your mind—forget him before it is too late—free your pure, young heart of the subtle meshes into which it is being drawn to be crushed and broken."

"Amen!" came in a lugubrious voice from the shadows of a rock, and then the tall, angular form of a man swung out into the mellow moonlight before the fugitives.

Captain Gillhooly drew his revolver.

CHAPTER IX.

A FEARFUL ADVENTURE.

We will now follow Prospect Pete, who, on leaving Gillhooly and the girls, proceeded to the entrance of the cavern in pursuit of the skulking thief that snatched the paper from Idyl's hands. With revolver in hand he emerged into the open air and stepped out into the canyon. At the same instant a coil of rope encircled his body and was drawn taut. He was jerked from his feet, but freeing his right hand he opened a fire on the unknown foe and succeeded in getting three shots before the revolver was knocked from his hand.

A dozen or more men at once surrounded him their lips reeking with profane threats. One of them struck a match and held it near the boy's face.

"Prospect Pete!" he exclaimed, "or you may shoot me for a mullet-head on the spot. Ye gods, hav'n't our wishes been fulfilled?"

"Good! the very rooster we want. Mount him, boys, and run him up to the 'Judgment Bar,' and extort from him the secret we want. Don't be merciful—use the rope—the knife—the fire—anything so you get the truth. I'll be up soon as we get through here," said an outlaw in a tone of authority.

Pete knew he was in the hands of a band of road-agents, and that he would have a rough time of it before he got out.

He was mounted upon a pony and his feet tied securely together by a cord passing under the animal's belly. He was then taken in charge by four mounted men and hurried away up the canyon at a lively pace.

In the course of an hour they left the great canyon, crossed over a series of rough, wooded hills and finally entered another canyon that wound and twisted like a serpent's trail into the heart of the great hills. At the head of this canyon they halted. High perpendicular walls rose up around them on three sides at the top of which great table rocks jutted out almost closing the rift overhead. Only a strip of the starry sky could be seen.

"This, Peter," said an outlaw, in a taunting tone, "is the famous Judgment Bar, and if you escape from here it will be by the skin of your teeth."

A fire was lighted with pine fagots, then the prisoner was made to stand erect with his feet close together and his arms lying parallel with his body when a long lariat was wound around and around his body from neck to heel pinioning his arms and legs so that he could move neither hand or foot. When thus secured he was permitted to sit down upon a boulder, and the outlaws sitting down before him, one of them said:

"Pete, you're young yit and mebbly a bright future's before you; but now we have your life at our mercy. Now, we want information from you, and are willin' to make a fair exchange."

"I have no assurance of this," replied Pete, "but your word and I wouldn't believe it more'n you could make me believe mica is gold."

"Then you propose to hold your tongue?"

"I'm no chicken-livered kid, I can tell ye that."

"But, sir, we'll make you speak out."

"Oh, ye will, will ye? then you know more 'bout the cloth I'm made of than I do."

"You're not too green to burn, that I know," retorted the outlaw, "and we now give you fair warning that if you refuse to answer some plain, straight questions, we'll sizzle you over a slow fire."

"I don't care if you kindle the fires of hell around me and under me, I'll go up in smoke and vapor and be whirled all around with the clouds of heaven, and my secret 'll go with me."

"Boy that's tremendous talk, but you'll find we're in earnest."

"So'm I," declared Pete.

"Well, we'll give you ten minutes to revolve the matter in your mind—think it over."

The four villains sat down by the fire when one of them took a map from his pocket and unfolded it. Pete recognized it at a glance, and blurted out:

"You miserable thieves! you stole that from Idyl Wynne—from the hand of a poor orphan gal whom you aren't face. Oh, ye gods! what gorgeous, valarious critters you be!—makin' war on women. When God made the spirit of four coyotes he found he'd no coyote bodies to put 'em in, and so he chucked 'em into four human bodies for which he had no spirits, and you four critters are that mixture. Tremendous critters!"

The outlaws laughed at this tirade, then all four of them turned to the fire and bent over the map. They glanced at the lines traced upon it and under these they read:

"To-day we started home through the hills having discovered one of the richest lodes, in my opinion, on the continent. We left but little trace of our prospecting. Men, money and machinery will be required to develop the mine—also, permission of government to operate the same. For all these we started home to-day when we were set upon by Indians and forced to take shelter in this cavern. The chances are against every one of us ever getting out alive; and so I write this note in hopes that some one may find it and forward it to my wife and daughter whose address is below. The above lines represent canyons and gorges. The star indicates the spot where we found evidence of an immense treasure. One acquainted with the topography of the country will have little difficulty in locating the place with aid of the above map. As near as we can judge the mine is ten miles west and five south of this cavern."

DANIEL WYNNE.

"P. S.—We have been here now five days, and to-night we propose to make a dash for life and liberty. Should I fall I pray God will help my wife and child."

D. W."

The outlaws' excitement became great when they had read these lines, and for the time being they almost forgot the captive in speculating over the location of the Wynne lode, and the probabilities of its already having been found by other parties.

As near as they could arrive at the fact, the mine was still a secret, and by possessing a key to the same a fortune seemed to await them.

But to open and operate the same Prospect Pete must be put out of the way, for he had heard all they had said.

One of them rose to his feet, and turned toward the captive. A cry burst from his lips. Pete was gone. He raised his eyes, and beheld the boy swing-

ing in mid-air forty feet above them and still rising up—up into the air of freedom!

And never was such a daring feat attempted.

While the outlaws were so deeply engrossed over the stolen paper, Pete's thoughts were busy as to his chances for life and liberty. This was all the freedom he had—the freedom of thought, nor did it bring him any consolation.

In the midst of his reflections a tiny pebble fell on his foot from above. He raised his eyes, and to his surprise saw the head and shoulders of a man on the ledge fifty feet above. He could not distinguish the features of the man, for the light did not reach him, but he could plainly see him outlined against the starry sky. Pete felt satisfied it was a friend, and nodded his head in recognition of his presence.

A moment later he saw the man lowering a rope with a noose on the end of it, and then he was satisfied that whoever the man was he was there to assist him. Down, down descended the rope until the noose swung before the lad's face. Pete threw his body forward and endeavored to place himself within it, but in this he failed, and the noose of its own weight slipped off. The man above evidently did not notice this, nor could Pete communicate the fact to him. But in his desperation—as if life depended upon it as a last expedient—he caught the dangling rope in his mouth and closed his teeth upon it with the gripe of an iron vise.

The unknown friend felt the pull upon the rope, and believing the captive had encircled his body with the noose, began drawing it up with a steady nerve. The boy's feet swung clear of the ground—up he rose slowly and surely—spinning around and around—swaying slightly—his life now depending upon his strength and endurance of his jaws and the nerve and coolness of the unknown friend.

Up and up went the daring, reckless boy. He could see the man pulling hand-over-hand upon the rope against the starry sky. The strain upon his jaws started a sound in his head like the roaring of a mighty torrent, and suddenly, when a cry from the lips of an outlaw came up to his ears, it seemed that he could no longer maintain his hold. His head grew dizzy; pistols below rung out. Bullets whistled through the air around him—the last hope had died from his breast, when suddenly the strong hand of the unknown reached down, seized him by the collar and dragged him up onto the ledge and back out of the reach of the enemies' bullets.

In an instant Pete was himself and as the rope fell from his jaws he sprang to his feet, and not until then did his friend know that he had hauled him up by his teeth.

The unknown was the first to speak.

"By the gospel of Bartholomew!" he exclaimed, "do you mean to tell me that I hauled you up by the teeth?"

"I do, stranger, and a tremendous strain it was on my jaws, I can tell you," replied Pete; "but will you please lend me a revolver to shoot them dancin' devils down there?"

"Yes, here's a revolver; peg it to the infernal scoundrels."

As the outlaws could not get out of the "Judgment Bar" without going a long way below, they remained by the fire cursing in impotent rage. Pete opened fire upon them, shouting at the top of his lungs at each shot:

"Ha! ha! how's that for a secret, old outlaw? How's this for the Judgment Bar? Gorgeous, ain't it, old honeysuckles?"

With the first shot an outlaw fell, and seeing that they were exposed to a deadly fire the others sought safety in the shadows.

"By the sword of Gideon! who be you, boy? what ye made of? are you a garter snake? or a young bull alligator?"

"I'm Prospect Pete; who are you, stranger?"

"Dancin' David! you Prospect Pete?" exclaimed the old man, "put her there ker-slap, boy, and have the honor o' 'squeezein' the handle of old Jack Drew."

"Good Lord! then you're the old detective that war spirited away a few weeks ago down to Dead-wood in the the Stock Exchange, who everybody thinks is dead!"

"I'm old Jack Drew, Peter, but just you remember I wer'n't spirited away so much as some folks think. I've seen too much of western life to be caught in a rumpus like that Stock Exchange affair. I'm glad people think I'm dead for when my plans are all ready to operate, I'll resurrect and come down onto some fellers with a rush that ar'n't been since Noah opened the Ark and sent the inmates thereof swarmin' down the stony sides of Ararat into the green valleys of Asia Minor."

"Well, by snakes!" exclaimed Pete, "I'm bum-fused; Jack, 'low me to thank you for yankin' me out of my predicament."

"Don't mention it, Peter, for I'll swear it makes me shiver. Come, I've a hoss up here, and if nothin' happens I want to make camp to-night. I wouldn't 'a' been this way if I hadn't got lost, and in wanderin' around heard voices in the canyon—looked down and see'd how things were and as I had a good long lariat along I thought I'd try and fish you out. What war them varmints doin' with you?"

Pete narrated his night's adventure with the robbers, the meeting of the girls in the cavern and the theft of the paper.

"Sword of Dam-na-ocles! that beats all I ever heard. Then ye don't know who it was that stole the paper?"

"It was a sneakin' outlaw, of course."

The two moved rapidly away through the hills a few miles and entered a canyon down whose course they turned. When nearing the point where it debouched into the great Red Stone Canyon they were

startled by hoof-strokes coming down the latter defile.

The redoubtable Jack Drew hitched his horse, and then he and Pete crept forward in the shadows and were just in time to see a horseman go sweeping past.

Prospect Pete clapped his hands with joy for he recognized the flying rider in the moonlight.

"Bully! it was Dashing Dan, the Boy Outlaw."

"Bully, eh? Peter, are you one of Dashin' Daniel's pilgrims? Am I in company with a bloody road-agent?"

"Hark!" exclaimed Pete, "there's others comin'—pursuers, perhaps. The outlaws are at it 'mongst themselves to-night."

They looked up the Red Stone and saw Captain Gillhooly and two women coming toward them. The captain was talking in a loud and earnest tone quite audible to the two in the shadows. Drew overheard a remark that he made, and, unable to hold in any longer, he shouted "Amen," and leaped out into the canyon before the party.

Gillhooly drew his revolver but before he could raise it Old Jack cried out:

"Easy there, general! I'm yours truly and affectionately."

"Stand aside or I'll fire," thundered the captain.

"Hold, captain!" exclaimed another voice, and then Prospect Pete appeared from the shadows.

A cry of joy burst from the lips of the party.

"We're rejoiced to see you here safe, Pete," the captain said.

"That gorgeous old pilgrim saved me, folks—he's true blue—you can trust him to the last."

"Yes, indeed," put in the old man. "I'm not handsome nor of a sweet disposition, but I'm real handy to have around when there's shootin' and fightin' to be did—specially if there's a pretty gal to fight for. Robbers and agents are pretty thick hereaways to-night?"

"They are, I must confess," replied the captain, "and one can't tell when he meets a friend any more."

"Stranger, that last brick may be intended for me, and if it is it's all right—one can't be too keeferful, but if you want me to prove my honesty and loyalty, jist trot out a few road-agents and I'll demolish 'em quicker nor a hound pup can lick a skillet, I will, by the gospel of St. Bartholomew!"

Scarcely had the last words fallen from his lips before half a dozen figures, that seemed conjured up from the darkness of the earth, rose up around them with masked faces and clicking revolvers, and demanded:

"Surrender—every devil of you, or we will fire!"

CHAPTER X.

OLD JACK LETS HIMSELF LOOSE.

OLD JACK made no reply to the outlaws' demand, but with a yell like that of a panther he sprung upon the nearest foe and engaged him in a deadly struggle. Prospect Pete leaped upon another while the other outlaws sprung forward and seized the bits of the two horses to prevent the escape of the riders.

The struggle was short and desperate. The canyon rung with the din of the conflict and awoke a hundred startling echoes.

A wild scream burst from Idyl's lips. Dolly Gray sprung to the ground, drew her revolver and sent a bullet crashing through the body of an outlaw. Before she could repeat the shot she was seized and disarmed.

A blow with a club felled Captain Gillhooly from his saddle. Prospect Pete was making terrible work with the foe, but seeing that he was unable to cope with the odds now against him, he turned and plunged into the shadows. This retreat, however, was not made until he had seen it would be suicidal to remain longer. Gillhooly was lying lifeless, as he supposed, while old Jack and his antagonist lay silent in death in the shadows. The girls were captives, and he could do them no good now, so that the only prudent course for him was to seek safety in flight.

Three of the outlaws had fallen in the encounter and the survivors only made sure they were dead, then hurried away up the canyon with their captives, Gillhooly having recovered consciousness, leaving the lifeless bodies of their friends at the mercy of the coyotes.

But scarcely were they out of hearing when the lithe figure of Prospect Pete crept from the shadows and bent over the prostrate form of Old Jack Drew. "Dead! dead!" the youth exclaimed in a half-choked voice, "poor old feller, I never got to pay his kindness to me. But, oh, snakes! what a fearless, gorgeous old soul he war. One thing's certain, his body sha'n't lay here for the coyotes to pick off what little flesh there's on his bones, and so I'll—"

His words were here cut short by the sound of hoof-strokes. The robbers with the captives were coming back reinforced by a number of friends.

Pete dodged across the canyon and concealed himself in a washout or rift dug by the action of water below the surface of the valley and which was ten or fifteen feet deep.

The outlaws now numbering five, with the captives, soon came up and halted on the scene of the conflict.

"We must conceal or bury the bodies of the boys," said one who now spoke in tones of authority.

Leaving two men to guard the captives the others proceeded to conceal the dead bodies. Having nothing with which to dig a grave, they selected a long, narrow rift in which to inter their dead, and

as it happened it was the very washout in which Prospect Pete was concealed. Its depths were as black as a wolf's mouth so that our young hero escaped discovery. It was some ten feet deep by three or four in width, and could be entered only from the lower end by a gradual descent.

When Pete learned that his hiding-place was to be converted into a tomb he became somewhat uneasy. He was afraid of detection, for he had not a doubt but that the robbers would carry their dead into the trench; but these fears were dispelled when he discovered the enemy were going to no such trouble—that they carried their friends to the head of the washout and deliberately dumped them into the hole.

With a sickening thud the first body fell at the very feet of the crouching Pete, and a shudder passed through the boy's form as he realized that he stood in the presence of death in the darkness of the tomb.

In a few minutes the second body was dropped into the washout. By this time Pete had fully recovered his composure and a thought struck his inventive brain. As they dropped the third body into the pit he gave utterance to a low, suppressed groan that reached the ears of those above.

"By heavens! did you hear that groan?" asked one of the outlaws.

"I did, I'll swear," answered another.

"Then one of the boys isn't dead," declared a third—"ah! there it goes again—gods! we don't want to bury any one alive. I'll run down and see about it."

The outlaw moved along to the lower end of the trench where he entered it and began groping his way along the black rift. He moved with his head inclined forward, peering into the gloom before him, and was nearing the head of the channel where the bodies had been dropped, when he received a blow on the head from an unseen foe, that had brought him to his knees, crying in a feeble tone for help.

"Good Lord! what can be the matter down there?" cried one of the men above.

The two at once hastened to the assistance of their friend.

Pete heard them coming and running half-way down the channel, laid down and pressed his body close in against the wall. There he remained until he heard the footsteps of the enemy brush apast him in the blinding gloom, when he arose and glided noiselessly from the rift.

Meanwhile, the two outlaws in charge of the captives were impatiently waiting the return of their friends. They stood with the reins of the horses in hand, while Gillhooly and the girl sat upon the animals securely bound.

The moon was shining bright on the scene of conflict. Her beams fell upon the bloody, upturned face of the old stranger, Jack Drew, who lay a few feet to one side.

The horses were restless and uneasy. The smoke of battle and the smell of blood still hung on the air.

Captain Gillhooly fixed his eyes in sad reflection upon the face of Jack Drew, and suddenly he started and with knitted brows gazed closer at the old man's bloody visage. He was sure he had seen his eyes open and close, but as it was not repeated he concluded, after a few minutes' further watching, that it was a delusion—that which appears to make the dead breathe. He turned his eyes from the ghastly face, but some mysterious power drew them back, when to his utmost horror and surprise, he beheld the supposed dead man lying upon his stomach in the act of bringing a revolver to bear on one of the outlaws whose face was turned in another direction!

Before he could scarcely realize the fact of the case the sharp bark of the weapon rung out, and with a low moan the outlaw fell to the earth.

The horses began to rear and plunge with affright, but the other outlaw clung to the reins and shouted like a madman for help—his voice rising in demoniac echoes through the night.

In an instant Jack Drew was upon his feet while forth from the shadows bounded Prospect Pete with a yell.

"By the sword of Gideon!" yelled old Jack, "I'm not so dead as I was—a rap on the head's not so bad as a bullet through it—so git here, ole outlaw, for I'm madder now'n a bull alligator in a canebrake—hurra, thar, Peter! give 'em 'ell and blue blazes smokin' hot—steady, gals—brace up, general, and we'll have you out o' this deeficklity quicker than a hound pup can lick a skillet—look out thar, Peter—jump that critter like a hull school o' wild-cats! whoa, hosses—steady, gals. Lord! I'm broke loose now wuss nor a litter o' alligators in a nigger camp-meetin'—yoop! hurrah for victory, and Prospect Pete, and the sword of Gideon!"

During the brief second Old Jack was uttering these excited words the changes came thick and fast. The remaining outlaw was knocked senseless, the plunging horses taken in charge and the bonds of their riders severed. But in the meantime, the two outlaws that Pete left in the rift came to the rescue. They dashed in between the cavorting horses and endeavored to get at Old Jack; but before they could do so Pete drove a rock into the face of one of them with such force and precision as to knock the fellow senseless. Then the other turned on the boy and the two grappled and fell. Old Jack saw the situation and with the yell of a panther he sprung to the boy's assistance and gave the outlaw a kick in the abdomen that curled him up like a sick bear on the ground.

The conflict had ended, and the old detective and Pete were again masters of the situation. But not a moment was to be lost in taking advantage of their victory, and leaving the outlaws writhing in

their agony, Old Jack led the way across the canyon to where he had left his horse and mounting the animal he made Pete climb up behind him and then they all rode rapidly away.

Gillhooly and the maidens no longer doubted the friendship of Old Jack, and the captain took the first opportunity to apologize for having ever expressed a doubt at first.

"I reckon as what that outfit 'll not pester us ag'in to-night," Old Jack observed as they rode along.

"Some of 'em won't," replied Pete, facetiously; "this has been an unhealthy moon for outlaws."

"And it 'll spread into a contagion afore I'm done 'ith 'em," added Jack, "for thar's goin' to be a reck-onin' up afore long, now mind."

"Oh, dear! this foolish adventure of mine, it seems, has been attended with dangers and deaths that I may be held accountable for," said Idyl, in a tone of sadness.

"Pshaw, little one!" exclaimed Old Jack, "all's well that ends well, and here we all go happy as suckin' doves. True, I've got a gash on my head less'n a mountain gap, and some sore bones and a blacked eye and smashed nose and a few other triflin' wounds, but then I've been used to sich things. I hav'n't got down to my normal condition in forty years so continuous has been my adventures. I don't b'lieve I'd known myself without a smashed mug or a black eye. You see one can get used to any thing from bein' blowed up by earthquakes to bein' kissed by pretty girls."

Dolly gray burst into a peal of laughter at this. Jeremiah of the eccentric old man.

Idyl gently reproached her young friend, although she wanted to laugh herself. She was afraid of wounding the old man's feelings.

"Let her flicker," put in the rough old fellow, "let her laff till the echoes take it up and set these old hills to shakin'. I like to hear a gal laff when it's got that bell-metal ring in it. It sets a thousand fancies whirlin' in my brain and my heart a-flutterin' with the happy spirit of youth. I war a boy once, and I never got over it entirely. In fact, I b'long now to the Boy Brigade of boy miners camped over here a few miles. And sich a rollickin' set of young scamps as they be, hav'n't been banded together since the Ark put into harbor on Arrarat. We're headed toward our camp now, and I guess I'll take you on over there and spend the night; and when there, you'll be in a crowd that ar'n't afraid to buck the hull tribes of Dashin' Dan and Argus Eye together."

"Do you mean to say you're a member of that Little Hurricane band of miners, pilgrim?" asked Prospect Pete.

"I solemnly declare and say that I am one of that Boy Brigade, though I'll admit I've been keepin' in the shade since the night of that Stock Exchange affair. I'm old in years I'll admit, and my face's tracked up considerable by the hoofs of old Time, but in spirit, I repeat, I am as festive and frolicsome as a young stud pony in a circus ring. For two weeks now, I've been layin' low, and if it hadn't been for this little diversion to-night with you folks, I'd 'a' died of stagnation o' the blood. But now I'm feelin' like myself again 'ith 'ception of this Corinthian dugout over my ear, and Doric Shanty above my eye, and a busted nozzle, and a sprained arm, and a lame leg, and a few more minor bruises not worth speakin' of."

Thus the old man's tongue ran on until the twinkle of a light fell upon their gaze some distance before them.

"That's in the shanty of the Boy Miners," Jack said, with a wave of the hand; "hail, holy light! offspring of He'ven's fust born."

"Oh, I am so glad this night's troubles are so near ended," said Idyl, gladly.

"But I'm awful 'fraid, Idyl," said Dolly, "that our friends on Eagle Cliff will be troubled about us."

"Never mind, little one," Old Jack remarked, "I'll send a messenger over there soon as we get landed. They're all right, I can assure you."

They rode on and soon drew rein before a long, low cabin.

The sound of a violin and the patter of feet came from within.

"The boys are havin' a little dance, I observe," said Jack. "That's the way we spend our nights—not a drop o' likker 'lowed in the cabin."

The party dismounted and were conducted into the cabin by the old detective. The presence of the girls was quite a surprise to the Brigade which at once relapsed into a confused silence. True, most of them had seen the fair Idyl Wynne before, and the spirit of gallantry at once took possession of the young miners; and rude as they were, they greeted the maidens with marked politeness.

Jack Drew explained matters briefly as possible, after having introduced his guests to each of the Brigade, when all seemed to vie with each other in entertaining the party, and making the maidens feel that they were the guests of true gentlemen.

There was one of the Brigade, however, that was absent. It was Harry Reynolds, or as we have known him before, Little Hurricane, the Boy Captain.

"He's gone to Deadwood," said Vagabond Dick, in reply to Old Jack's inquiry after him, "and we're lookin' for him back most any moment."

"We'd 'a' been asleep afore this had we not been waitin' for him," added another; "he went down to place our discovery on record."

"Discovery? what d'ye mean?" queried Jack.

"Why, my dear old boy, we've found one of the richest lodes in America. We feel to-night that we're millionaires. You see a stranger came along and fell in with us, and it was really through him that we found the lode, and as he showed himself to

be an experienced miner, we took him in, staked out our claim, and proceeded to effect an organization. We call it the Little Hurricane Mining Company, and have elected the stranger, David Stone, superintendent."

Idyl Wynne started at mention of the name of David Stone, and she was about to speak, when a horseman, with face masked, dashed to the very threshold of the cabin and drew rein, and leaning over in his stirrups, thrust his head in at the door and shouted in a loud, menacing tone:

"Gentlemen, I come to warn you now, so that you may not complain of the result that is likely to follow, that you have boldly dared public opinion and invited public vengeance, in deliberately making Dashing Dan, the Boy Outlaw, superintendent of the Little Hurricane mine."

An exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of the young miners as they started to their feet.

A cry, as if of agony, wailed from Idyl Wynne's lips.

Old Jack Drew advanced toward the door. As he did so the horseman straightened in his saddle, and galloped away through the envolving shadows in the direction of Deadwood.

CHAPTER XI.

DAVID STONE IN THE HANDS OF VIGILANTS.

THE Boy Miners were completely thunderstruck by the declaration of the masked horseman that their superintendent, David Stone, was Dashing Dan; but even while they were discussing the matter, Little Hurricane, and the superintendent, himself, returned from Deadwood.

At sight of the latter, Idyl Wynne started, for she recognized him as the same mysterious David Stone that had called at the restaurant; at least, he wore the very same disguise, and she had not a doubt but that under it was the handsome face of the youth who had delivered her the daguerreotype—yea, he who had won her young heart's affection—he who had appeared in the cavern that same night at the head of a score of men and announced himself as Dashing Dan!

The superintendent was not a little surprised at the presence of Idyl and Dolly in the cabin, but quickly recovering his wonted composure, he advanced, and politely bowing to the girls, said, in a low, pleasant voice, familiar to Idyl's ears:

"I must confess, ladies, I am somewhat surprised to see you here, yet truly glad to meet you."

"Thank you," replied Idyl, with some inward agitation.

"We have just returned from Deadwood," Stone went on, "and the folks down there told us you were off with the Gordon excursion party on Eagle Cliff."

"We did go with that party, but I must confess that a foolhardy adventure of mine resulted in landing us here," replied Idyl.

"Did you succeed in finding the cavern?" he asked in a low tone.

"Do you not know the result of my night's adventure?" Idyl asked, fixing a close look upon his face.

"I assure you I do not, Miss Wynne," was his reply.

A look of surprise that deepened into disdain mounted to Idyl's face. She was satisfied now that the man before her was uttering a deliberate falsehood—adding insult to injury. She knew now that he was the Boy Outlaw—that it was he who had appeared in the cavern, though in a different disguise. And yet a minute's reflection made it appear strange that he could have been at the cavern in the fight—afterward return to Deadwood, and then come back to the Little Hurricane, and all in such a short space of time. But it was undoubtedly so, strange as it seemed. She had seen him in the cavern with her own eyes, and afterward saw him riding down the canyon toward Deadwood at a swift gallop. And as she recalled all these facts, and the fact that he alone of all others knew her secret, the thought occurred to her that it might have been him who, in the darkness of the cavern, had snatched the paper from her hand and fled with her secret and placed it in the hands of the four men who had conducted Pete to the Judgment Bar.

These thoughts and partial convictions made her sick at heart, and rising she and Dolly walked over to the other end of the cabin and sat down by themselves.

"Well, Jack," said Harry Reynolds, "how have you been since the night we were at the Stock Exchange?"

"Bully, boy—splendorific! The train is pretty well laid now, and I think I can put my finger on every gasted outlaw in Deadwood; but then we've just had a bit of mystery."

"Mystery? what was it?"

A man in mask rode up to our door a few minutes afore you come and informed us that David Stone, Superintendent of the Little Hurricane, was Dashing Daniel, the Boy Outlaw."

An exclamation of surprise burst from many lips. David Stone seemed to fairly wince under the looks that were fixed upon him. He saw that an explanation was demanded—that he could not keep silent.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I deny the charge, though I am now compelled to admit, since your suspicions and the suspicions of others,"—and he glanced toward Idyl Wynne,—"*have been aroused, that I am not the person that I appear to be in one sense.*"

As he concluded he removed one of the most ingenious wigs and masks that Jack Drew, in all his varied experience as a detective, had ever seen, revealing the face of a boy of nineteen.

"Oh, gracious, Idyl!" Dolly involuntarily exclaimed, "it's that Dashing Dan!—that young outlaw!"

The accused turned his head. A smile was upon his handsome face. His soft liquid eyes sparkled with a strange light.

"By the sword of Damocles! I believe the gal's right!"

"*Et tu Brute,*" said David Stone, then he burst into a peal of rollicking laughter, and turning paced the floor a time or two.

"I can prove," he said, "by Harry Reynolds, that I have been by his side since dark—not out of his sight an hour."

"That's so, boys," affirmed Reynolds.

Prospect Pete uttered a sharp whistle of surprise.

"Wal," said Old Jack, "there's still somethin' dasted queerish 'bout it—strange coincident."

"Then Dashing Dan must be your twin brother," said Captain Gillhooly, "for he is your exact counterpart."

"I have no brother resembling me more than you do, captain."

"Then what does this all mean?"

"Time will tell, I presume."

The Boy Brigade became absorbed in profound thought. Stone had deceived them as to his identity, whether he was Dashing Dan or not. Not one of the brigade had ever known Dan Dashiell, the Boy Mountaineer, before he was secretly employed to hunt Argus Eye down, so it was not possible for them to make his acquaintance after he had turned road-agent.

Captain Gillhooly and Harry Reynolds discussed the matter next morning in private. There was a mystery involved in it to the captain.

During the forenoon of that day, Idyl Wynne, Dolly Gray and the young captain started for Eagle Cliff with Prospect Pete as guide—little dreaming of the dangers that were to attend that journey.

The day was nearly spent in feverish excitement at the Little Hurricane. The Brigade was assembled in the cabin discussing the situation, when a score of masked men, led by Colonel Clement Bland, came up from the direction of Deadwood, and drew up before the door.

Old Jack Drew quickly donned David Stone's disguise, which lay on the table where Stone had left it, and went out to confer with the Vigilants.

"Anything wanted, gentlemen?" he asked, disguising his voice.

"Sir," replied Bland, "we're here to arrest the Superintendent of the Little Hurricane on suspicion of being Dashing Dan."

"S'pose we refuse to give him up?" asked the disguised detective.

"In such an event we'd be compelled to take him by force," responded Colonel Bland.

"Don't overlook the fact, colonel," put in Vagabond Dick, "that the Boy Brigade's not a band of cowards if we are boys. We've all seen active service, and are not the fellers to cave in even though the odds and a Vigilant Committee are fo'nt us. If you undertake to bull this thing through you'll find a little the warmest time you've seen since the night old Jack Drew disappeared so mysteriously."

"We're here for David Stone, and will have him dead or alive, and not to bandy words with a runt of a boy," was the ill-flung reply of Bland, that invoked a burst of laughter from his followers.

"Then you'll have a ill-roarin' time, either way," retorted Dick.

"That's the talk, Dick, that's the talk!" exclaimed the Brigade.

The Vigilants drew their revolvers.

A bloody conflict was imminent, for in a moment the boys were armed for a fight.

But David Stone was equal to the occasion in coolness and courage. He would not jeopardize the lives of the Brigade to screen himself, and with a revolver in each hand, he stepped boldly out in front of the cabin facing the Vigilants.

"It's him! it's the young outlaw!" yelled the band.

"Gentlemen, be you Vigilants, outlaws, angels or imps, I am not to be taken like a dog."

"Hear the young outlaw!" roared a Vigilant derisively.

"I brand every man a liar who says I'm an outlaw. I am not!"

"Surrender, and we'll give you a chance to prove your innocence."

"I'll surrender on one condition, and that is that you give me a trial right here, and that I be permitted to send to town for one witness. I know I could not get a fair hearing there in a howling mob, and I am as anxious to prove my innocence as you are my guilt, gentlemen, and remove all mistrust from the breasts of my friends here; otherwise, I'd die before surrendering."

The Vigilants held a long, private consultation; finally, to Stone's proposition, Colonel Bland replied:

"To avert bloodshed we will accept your proposition, and send to Deadwood for two witnesses; that is, we will give you a trial here—a fair, impartial hearing away from the excitement of the camp."

The superintendent's terms being accepted he became the prisoner of the Vigilants, and was placed under guard, but not bound.

A Vigilant was dispatched for the prosecuting witnesses while Prospect Pete volunteered to bring Stone's witness. Each of these messengers promised secrecy on leaving, but somehow or other the whole thing leaked out and strange miners, as well as those that were well known, began to drop in. By midnight not less than a hundred men were at the Little Hurricane; but not until the next morning did the trial begin.

Judge Walker had been secretly brought up from Deadwood so that he was to preside over the cause.

Colonel Clement Bland was selected as attorney for the prosecution, and Old Jack Drew, who still remained disguised, was to defend.

When the court was called to order the crowd became quiet and orderly.

The handsome, boyish face of the prisoner—free of all looks of guilt, seemed to enlist the deepest sympathy.

Among the crowd was a single female known to many present as Undine Blake, the sister of the boy nomad, Prospect Pete. What she was there for was a question in the minds of three-fourths of the assembly. She could not be a witness, and yet it could not be morbid curiosity.

Undine Blake was not a handsome woman, yet those who knew her admired her for her good qualities. She was modest, unassuming and lady-like in all her actions. It was generally known that she exercised a motherly influence over her brother, Prospect Pete, being several years his senior. She might have been all of thirty years of age, and yet might have been younger, for she wore glasses that gave her a matronly appearance. Her hair, which was combed low and smooth on her forehead, was streaked with gray. She was slightly stooped in the shoulders, yet easy and graceful in movement.

Naturally enough, a woman in such a crowd would have to run the gantlet of every eye, yet her presence was regarded with all the courtesy and respect due from gentlemen. And seeing this, some inquisitive minds concluded that she was brought there on purpose that her presence might keep down a spirit of turbulence which might otherwise arise.

After some delay and wrangling over minor matters that appeared to be merely for the purpose of delay, the trial began; and all knew, who knew aught of the court of Judge Lynch, that the trial would be a mere farce and would finally end in conviction and death, no matter what the evidence might be in favor of the prisoner.

CHAPTER XII.

HURLED OVER THE CLIFF.

WE will now leave the Little Hurricane for awhile to follow up the adventuresome footsteps of Prospect Pete, who was sent to escort Captain Gillhooly, Idyl Wynne and Dolly Gray over to Eagle Cliff. They could have gone directly to Deadwood in the same time and just as easily, but the girls were anxious to return to their friends on the cliff from whence they had gone in a manner that gave them great distress. The young captain was also very anxious to meet his affianced wife, the fair Irene Gordon; and for these reasons they set off for Eagle Cliff.

Their way lay eastward from the Little Hurricane over a rough, broken and mountainous country, and the Boy Miner would have considered it dangerous had he not believed that the outlaws, that generally infested that section, had been drawn off in another direction and engaged in the active and bloody work of the past two days and nights.

With high hopes the party began the journey on foot. It would have been an arduous one for women less strong and resolute than Idyl and Dolly. Pete was especially attentive to Miss Gray, while the gallant captain assisted Idyl in descending or ascending the dangerous paths they were compelled at times to follow. Pete and Dolly were happy and joyous, Captain Gillhooly was full of hope, but Idyl was sad at heart. The guilt and the fate of David Stone were ever present in her mind. Albeit the assurance given her of his innocence, it seemed in view of the evidence that had already been presented to her, that it could not possibly be true.

Once they sat down to rest when she said to Pete:

"Pete, do you think there is any doubt of David's guilt?"

"Miss Idyl he's as innocent as I am," declared the boy.

"You're not as innocent as an angel of being a bad boy," put in Dolly with a girlish laugh.

"That's what the captain there, thought once," said Pete.

"Yes," said the captain, "but the very act I condemned then, I now regard an act of daring heroism. Perhaps David Stone's guilt will turn out as yours—a blessing in disguise."

"There's been a good deal of double actin' round Deadwood of late," observed Pete, "and the masks 'll soon begin to drop from some of their faces, I'll bet."

Thus they conversed for half an hour when they resumed their journey. Before them was a rugged hill whose ascent they began. Slowly and carefully they toiled up along a narrow path. They reached the top of the ridge and stopped a moment to catch their breath. Their course now lay along the ridge which was flanked upon one side by the valley they had just left, and on the other by a black abyss hundreds of feet deep. The ridge was covered with clusters of trees and bushes, from behind which—as the four started forward—five men in the disguise of savages leaped out and confronted them. With cocked rifles leveled full upon the breast of Gillhooly and Pete, the leader of the party shouted:

"Surrender! drop them revolvers!"

The girls uttered a scream, then Idyl fell in a swoon.

"Devils!" cried Prospect Pete, with intense bitterness, "you have killed that poor girl! you are cowards and sneaks!"

"Drop them revolvers or we'll drop you," was the only reply the outlaw made.

Gillhooly threw his revolver on the ground and

kneeling by the side of Idyl, raised her head and pillowed it on his arm while he and Dolly endeavored to revive her. But Prospect Pete was determined they should not have his weapons, and drawing his revolver, he hurled it over the cliff.

"I've a mind to send you after it," said one of the painted villains grasping the boy by the collar; "but we'll attend to your case in time."

It was some minutes before Idyl recovered from her swoon. When she did Captain Gillhooly tried to cheer her up with kind words of encouragement; but the presence of those painted villains filled her soul with terror.

Pete and the captain's hands were finally bound and then the outlaws marched them all away captives. Dolly proved somewhat troublesome and the men threatened to place her in bonds, when the maiden promised obedience and submission. But the moment no eye was upon her she slipped her hand behind Pete's back and untied his bonds, whispering, "Run." But instead of making a dash for liberty, the boy turned and snatching a revolver from the belt of one of their captors, shot the villain dead.

In an instant the others turned like demons upon the boy.

"Run, Pete, run!" cried Dolly Gray, excitedly; "oh! they will murder you!"

With a fearful oath an outlaw drew a knife and started toward the lad, but Dolly sprung between them and with uplifted hands and streaming eyes begged for the fearless boy's life.

"Curse him!" hissed another; "fling him over the cliff and crush him. Don't stain your knife with his vile blood!"

An outlaw pushed forward and seizing Dolly by the wrist dragged her away, while another—a powerful man—seized Pete and began dragging him toward the precipice.

The other captives saw what the villain meant to do, and begged that he might be spared such a horrible fate. But the demons were relentless. There was nothing human in their hearts. Tears and prayers availed nothing. The man—or rather the fiend—by brute force dragged the boy to the edge of the cliff, and lifting him bodily from the earth, dropped him over the ledge. As he went down, however, Pete threw out his hand and caught the ragged edge of the rock where he hung suspended in mid-air—his eyes lifted imploringly to his enemies. But still there was no mercy in those fiendish breasts, for, with a devilish laugh, the big outlaw advanced and trampled upon the boy's fingers till the blood burst from their ends—till losing his gripe he dropped downward into the black abyss—a wild cry bursting from his lips and wailing up to the ears of the horrified captives like the piteous cry of a lost soul.

"There!" said the brutal outlaw, "that'll end the work of that young tramp."

They turned away from the cliff and walked back to the three captives who were bowed down with the most heartrending sorrow over the inhuman murder of Prospect Pete. To Dolly Gray the boy's death came with cruel, crushing force, for he was her heart's ideal hero.

The outlaw slain by Pete was thrown into a little washout and stone piled upon him; then the captives were conducted away northward through the hills.

By this time Captain Gillhooly began to feel that his forte in soldiering lay in being an outlaw captive. Ever since he had entered the hills bent upon the capture of Dashing Dan and Argus Eye, one reverse after another had met him at every turn. It is true, he traced the beginning of his troubles to Prospect Pete's running away with his horse, and yet he had thanked the boy a hundred times for the act.

The maidens were well-nigh prostrated with their grief over Pete's terrible death, and the dreadful fate that seemed to threaten themselves. Idyl's strength was fast failing her, and their captors, much to the surprise of all the captives, stopped occasionally to allow her to rest.

In this way they had journeyed some three miles in as many hours. They were entering a more densely wooded country, where the patches of darkness lay deep. A deathlike stillness reigned. But suddenly it was broken by the sharp crack of a rifle, that was followed by a groan from one of the outlaws, who, reeling backward, fell dead with a bullet hole through his head.

A puff of smoke hanging on the air up along the hillside told from whence had come the deadly shot. All eyes were fixed upon that spot with a startled look. Above a great rock they saw the head and shoulders of what they at first took for a man gazing toward them; but a closer look told them that it was a dark, hairy form not unlike that of a panther. The sight of this strange creature filled the maiden's breast with a new terror, while the outlaws seemed silently transfixed.

For several moments all stood and gazed at the demon-slayer, then as they slowly recovered their senses the outlaws drew their revolvers and opened a fire on the creature, which at once fell back behind the rock; but no one knew whether it had been hit or not, nor was there a man among the outlaws that would dare venture up to see. As the object, however did not appear again, the outlaws hastily removed their friend's body to one side and covered it with rocks, then hurried away as if impelled by fear.

But, scarcely half a mile had been traversed when down from among the rocks on the right, and before them, came another deadly bullet, and another outlaw fell to rise no more.

A wild, triumphant scream, like that of a madman, followed close upon the report of the unerring rifle, down into that valley, and again lifting their

eyes all saw, standing out in plain view, that mysterious avenger, who seemed to be inviting outlaw shots. But the two remaining outlaws never stopped to fire a single shot, nor care for their dead friend, but with Gillhooly in front of them, Idyl on one side and Dolly on the other, as if for protection from that avenger's bullets, they hurried forward at a rapid pace.

But, all this availed the wicked wretches nothing, for no sooner had they begun to breathe easier than the gun of the avenger rung out, and another of the doomed men fell, shot through the brain.

"My God!" cried the one remaining wretch, his face ghastly with terror and his lips quivering with that intense horror of one standing in the presence of death.

"Man," said Captain Gillhooly, "you are doomed—an Avenging Nemesis is following you to your death!"

"Boom!" rung that terrible gun in thunderous echoes, and the villain staggering, almost fell. From a wound on the forehead blood was running in little rivulets down his face.

"Oh, God!" cried the outlaw glaring around him like one whose brain was on fire, "what shall I do?"

"That's a question that comes too late," answered the captain, "but perhaps you would have no objections now to releasing my hands."

Without a word but with trembling hands the outlaw untied the captain's bonds.

The girls were trembling with fear in each other's arms.

"Don't be frightened, girls; that is a friend of ours, I feel positive," encouraged Gillhooly, then turning to the terror-stricken outlaw he continued: "Man, this is retributive justice for the inhuman oath of Prospect Pete. But go—flee for your life!"

The fellow turned and like a wounded deer started off.

"Stop!" cried a wild, startling voice from the ledge above.

The man stopped, reeled backward and clasped his brow as if to protect it from a descending thunderbolt.

Our three friends lifted their eyes and beheld the hairy form of a panther-like creature lying prone up the rock with a gun before it, glaring with its shaggy-browed eyes down upon the outlaw.

There was a moment of dead silence which was finally broken by the strange creature crying out:

"Villain, your hour has come to die like a miser. The dog where the wolves and vultures will pick your bones. The spirit of Prospect Pete entered my body when you hurled him over the cliff, and that spirit is crying out for revenge. I have followed you for that revenge. You can not escape."

The outlaw rallied his courage and drawing his revolver fired at the speaker: but the ball went wide of its mark, and before the echoes of the pistol had died away that deadly rifle rung out and the wilderness brigand, staggering forward and clutching at the open air, fell forward dead.

Then the figure on the hillside rose to an upright position, shook its hairy form and gave utterance to a wild laugh that echoed among the rocks and hills like the laugh of a satyr.

The girls started and looked up at the avenger. They had heard that laugh before.

"Who in the name of heaven are you?—what are you?" demanded the young officer.

"I'm your old friend, captain," was the answer that came back, and then the horrible, panther-skin disguise dropped at the speaker's feet and Prospect Pete, the Boy Miner, stood looking down upon them.

"Oh, it is Pete! Pete!" cried Dolly, clapping her little hands and weeping with joy.

Descending the hill the boy approached his three friends in flesh and blood but his face bore cruel marks of his adventures. His face and hands were lacerated and bloody, and one of his eyes almost swollen shut.

"Heavens, Pete! how did you escape death at that cliff?" exclaimed Gillhooly as he took the boy's hand.

"Close work, captain—closest since old Jacksy Drew pulled me out of the Judgment Bar by the teeth. You see, after that big brutal demon tramped my fingers and I lost my grip and fell downwards, the Lord helped me. The face of that cliff was straight up, and from the cracks and crevices in it a perfect curtain of long, trailing vines grew out. And now and then a small bush struggled outward and upward from a big hole in the cliff. Well, I hadn't fell ten feet afore I struck one of them bushes which broke my fall considerable, and bounced me in close against the wall when I laid hold of some vines and clung for dear life; but, little by little the vines tore loose, and I sunk downward; but, sir, as sure as I'm here, them vines were tangled and woven in among each other like a box of fish-hooks, and to pull one down was to bring another with it, and it was that way from the head to the foot of that cliff so that when I finally reached the bottom of the abyss I was rolled, like a butterfly in his chrysalis, in at least a ton of vines which had broken my fall! And I tell you I had some fun ontanglin' myself, but I finally got out and rose to my feet to see if I was dead or alive, for I tell you all these things crowded me so fast that I didn't know much of anything. But I finally got the kinks in my mind straightened out, and then I took a list of my injuries. A blacked eye, scratched face and mashed fingers war all I could make out; and then I began to think 'bout you folks. I looked up at the sky and around me. There was only one outlet from the gorge, and I was about to strike out when I discovered a suspicious lookin' hole in the rock near me that called for investigation. The hole was

partly screened by vines and bushes, and pushing through these I found myself in a kind of a pocket or cave and what was my surprise to find it was a perfect arsenal. There war many rifles there, scads of revolvers, boxes of cartridges, hats, coats, masks and all sich kind of plunder. I knew at once it war a secret store-house of Old Argus Eye and made up my mind to make myself at home. So I domed that panther-skin outfit, and a good one it war, and selected me a pair of revolvers and a fine Sharpe's rifle and struck out determined to make it tropical for them four outlaws.

"I had no trouble in follerin' your trail and soon come in sight of you. Then I come the demon-slayer on them as I've read about in Ingin stories, and the rest you all know."

"Brave and noble boy, your equal does not live!" cried Captain Gillhooly when he had heard the boy's story through.

Idyl and Dolly were so overcome with joy that they kissed the dirty-faced boy repeatedly, and Pete, himself, felt so proud of his daring exploits and the reception given him by his friends, that for a moment he forgot that other dangers might be near. But it was only for a moment, then taking the lead he again headed in the direction of Eagle Cliff where they finally arrived amid the wildest excitement and tears of joy, as the reader can well imagine.

Idyl and Dolly were first called upon for the cause of their prolonged absence, which Idyl gave, expressing the deepest regrets for having been the means of casting trouble over the joys of the party.

Mr. Gordon, on behalf of the whole party, readily forgave the girls their escapade, and then in turn narrated their adventures with the outlaws, and that strange old man whose identity was still a mystery to them.

"Laws!" said Pete, "I can tell you who he was—it war that gorg'ous old detective, Jack Drew."

"Jack Drew!" exclaimed Gordon; "I've heard of him, and I want to meet him in daylight. He has no equal in America I dare say."

"Unless it is Prospect Pete," said Captain Gillhooly.

The Boy Miner did not tarry long at the cliff, but took his departure for the Little Hurricane. He wanted to be at the trial of David Stone. As he walked away, Dolly Gray ran up to his side and looking up into his face said:

"Now, Pete, do be careful, for my sake?"

"Your sake, Dolly?" he replied, "do you like me? Gosh! if you do I'll be the happiest boy in the hills, for I think you're the bossiest and gorg'ousest girl in the world."

"Of course I like you, Pete," she said, with a blush.

Pete stooped and kissed her fair brow, and then bounded away.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD JACK DREW AS AN ATTORNEY AND DETECTIVE.

THE trial of David Stone continued through the forenoon and until the middle of the afternoon. There were a score of witnesses for the prosecution, and most of them swore positively that they had known the prisoner before he had betrayed his friends and turned outlaw, and that David Stone was that very same individual. Then others that had never been known to have a dollar about them, swore that this self-same David Stone had met them one place and another and under threats of instant death compelled them to disgorge their money and valuables.

Of course, this was evidence that was hard to rebut, and the judge, swayed by strong prejudices, virtually gave the defense to understand that it would be useless to attempt it. Moreover, it became noised around that the Boy Brigade was likely to become implicated on the grounds of having harbored the prisoner, and after the evidence was all in, and while Colonel Bland was reviewing the same in an elaborate argument, a stranger placed a note in Harry Reynolds's hand which read as follows:

"SIR—you will see for yourself that your superintendent is Dashing Dan, and will hang! It has also been ascertained that the Little Hurricane is an 'old discovery,' made by the father of Miss Idyl Wynne six years ago, and it can be proven that Dashing Dan, alias David Stone, by betraying the confidence of Miss Wynne, and obtaining from her the secret of the existence of such a mine, jumped the claim of Daniel Wynne which is now operated as the Little Hurricane. We believe you boys have been duped and deceived by this cunning young outlaw, and we have no desire to persecute you. By denouncing your superintendent and quitting the Little Hurricane at once you will escape the vengeance of—

"THE VIGILANTS."

"Just so," mused young Harry; "this thing's getting to be thunderingly mixed, and it seems that some one else is trying to dupe us innocent boys besides Dashing Dan."

At this juncture Colonel Bland closed his argument, and as old Jack Drew was to speak next, Harry turned his attention from the letter, for he knew the old detective would throw a boom into the enemy's camp.

"Your honor," Old Jack began, "I've been prancin' around here all day in clothes that ar'n't my own, so I b'lieve I'll strip myself so's you can see that I'm no humbug," and, as he concluded, he removed the mask and wig from his face.

A general consternation followed.

"Tis Jack Drew!" yelled a score of voices in profound astonishment, for all who had seen the old man at the "Stock Exchange" that eventful night,

believed he was dead. None was more startled than Colonel Bland. It was with a great effort that the judge succeeded in restoring order. When he did, old Jack looked over the audience, and at the judge, and then went on:

"Yer honor, I presume some folks are surprised to see me here, but I'm here, notwithstanding the trick at the Stock Exchange. I'm an old bird—too old to be caught on chaff; therefore, I believe most all that's been sworn to here to-day, is dod-gasted confabulation—false clean through and through. I believe that boy, Dave Stone, innocent because I don't believe he is guilty. I know he's not a bully boy with a glass-eye"—here there was a faint commotion, "but I do believe if this court insists on persecutin' him that'll be an earthquake in this 'ere camp. I warn ye, judge, to set that boy free, for I tell you there's a storm brewin'—a volcano smolderin' under your judicial bench; and if this trial forces the issue, that'll be a devil-oment that'll set all Deadwood to chawin' her cud. You'll think one hundred thousand speckled alligators are loose in a canebrake arter one poor, one-eyed nigger child. You see, judge, I've had an eye on this Argus Eye and Dashin' Dan business some weeks, and although it's somewhat mixed up, to the eyes of the unsophisticated, the real facts, and the true facts, and the holy facts will soon show themselves. If this persecution of that boy is continued, I'll turn the tiger loose, now mind!"

As the old man concluded, there came a deep, dead silence over the crowd. His words had filled the minds of the audience with wonder and surprise. They were freighted with a hidden meaning.

A mystery seemed developing. Colonel Bland paced the floor on the right of the judge's seat with a restless impatience. His eyes were cast downward, though, now and then, he raised them and swept them over the dumfounded audience with a quick, feverish look that betrayed his deep agitation.

The judge himself was astounded, but finally, fixing his gaze upon Jack Drew, he said:

"Mr. Drew, evidence alone must guide me in my decision. The defense has offered no rebutting testimony—has not put a single witness on the stand, and your arguments for the defense have been nothing but a series of threats based upon some suspicion which doubtless rests alone in your own mind. The court will not be intimidated—will shrink from no duty, however painful; and in view of the facts deduced in the testimony, I cannot do otherwise than declare the prisoner guilty of the charge preferred, and pronounce the extreme penalty of justice, *which is death!*"

A deep silence followed this sentence, but it was soon broken by a clear, thrilling whistle.

Every eye at once turned in the direction whence the sound came, and to the surprise of all they beheld Undine Blake standing upon a table above the crowd with a revolver in her left hand while with the right she hastily threw aside her glasses and wig of long hair—dashed the shawl about her shoulders and the dress upon her form at her feet, and stood forth in male attire, the living counterpart of David Stone!

Simultaneous with this act of the woman, there was a movement in the cabin, and two score of men with drawn revolvers and badges that had sprung suddenly into place upon their breasts, ranged themselves across the room in front of the woman.

The judge was thunderstruck. Colonel Bland turned red and white by turns. The audience were spell-bound and speechless. Every man heard his own heart beat.

The sudden transformation of the meek Undine Blake into a handsome, flashing-eyed youth of twenty—with more of the fearless daring and reckless abandon than even David Stone possessed, seemed the very work of magic; and as he stood up there, erect and unflinching—revolver in hand—he exclaimed in a clear, ringing voice:

"Gentlemen, judge and jury, I proclaim the innocence of David Stone, and denounce the injustice of this court. I freely confess that I am the culprit, Dashing Dan; but I deny that I have ever turned outlaw in spirit, and betrayed those who employed me to circumvent Argus Eye, the road-agent; and furthermore, I can prove what I say. Perhaps you may deem it cowardly and unmanly to hide behind the petticoats of a woman, but the end justified the means. I set out to bring Argus Eye to justice and with the help of my brave followers, Prospect Pete, and latterly, of Jack Drew, I think I have about succeeded in my work. Gentlemen, the band of Dashing Dan is here. So is Argus Eye and a part of his band, and—"

"Hear! hear!" yelled a score of voices above the confusion made by a general rush for the door.

"Stand!" shouted the youth on the table; "block the door men and let no man escape!"

"Clear the way here!" yelled the crowd surging toward the door like stampeded cattle.

A wild confusion reigned. Yells and curses rose on the air. Blows were followed by the crack of revolvers and groans and yells of agony.

A general fight in which the Boy Miners took an active part ensued.

In five minutes half the crowd had rushed out of the cabin leaving Dashing Dan master of the situation.

When the smoke of battle had cleared from the room Old Jack Drew was found standing over a prostrate form.

Dashing Dan and Harry Reynolds hurried to the side and found that it was the insensible form of Colonel Clement Bland.

"Is he dead?" asked Harry.

"No, but I had to give him a thunderin' jolt on the head to fetch him down."

"What does this mean?" cried a miner; "why this murderous assault on Colonel Bland?"

"It means that the ends of justice are about to be served," replied Old Jack; "that man, stranger, is Argus Eye, the road-agent."

"Impossible!" cried the miner; "Colonel Bland is one of our very best citizens; ay, one of our leading Vigilants."

"I don't care a cuss if he was old Hickory himself; he's Argus Eye, all the same," declared Jack.

"Another thing," said the miner, "that is conclusive evidence that the colonel is not Argus Eye is his having two eyes, while everybody knows that the outlaw has but one—one argus eye."

"Yes, yes," responded Old Jack; "that eye-business is what's been makin' a mess o' fools of all our folks. I found that out soon arter I landed in Deadwood, and found how things war mystified, so I went to work in the employ of the stage and express companies to unravel this hull outlaw mystery. I soon found out that Dashing Dan was true to his trust, and that Argus Eye was doin' the hull devilment and cunningly fixin' it on Dan. The fact is, Colonel Bland was one of the leading citizens that employed Dashing Dan to turn outlaw, in order to circumvent Argus Eye, himself. So you see the colonel could pull both strings. When Dan moved he knew it, and this enabled the colonel to carry on his nefarious outlawry and robbery with success and impunity, and, to finally fix the charge of turning traitor on Dan and his band. But Dan and his boys were determined cusses and they resolved never to give up nor yield a point till Old Argus was routed. It war I that discovered that Argus and Colonel Bland were one and the same."

"I can't believe it yet that the colonel is Argus Eye," persisted the miner.

"Nor I, nor I," repeated several others who had always been great admirers of the colonel.

"Then I'll prove it to you," said Jack, "but first let us carry the colonel out into the air. It's awful hot in here."

Four men carried the colonel out into the open air and placed him on a blanket on the ground. When he was lifted from the cabin floor it was found that blood was dropping from his side. He had been wounded in the fight. An examination showed that he had been shot and seriously if not mortally wounded.

This discovery created no little feeling on the part of those who still believed in the colonel's innocence, and for a time another conflict was threatened.

Dashing Dan drew up his men in line before the cabin and stood ready for any emergency. All his followers had divested themselves of their disguises, and it was now discovered that some of the best young men of the camp were followers of Dashing Dan.

Like the cowardly poltroons they were, all of Colonel Bland's followers deserted him, while the miners were only restrained from avenging the colonel's wrongs by the presence of Dashing Dan's men.

"Now," said Old Jack, "I'll prove to you that Bland is Argus Eye," and kneeling by the side of the prostrate form, he placed his thumb under the colonel's right eye and pressed upward against the ball, which, to the surprise and horror of all, popped from its socket and rolled like a marble upon the ground.

"Ye see now, don't ye, the secret of Argus Eye?" asked Old Jack, holding the artificial optic up between his thumb and finger, "two good eyes for Colonel Clement Bland, and but one for Argus Eye, the Outlaw! Oh, but the colonel was a royal fraud!"

This was all-sufficient evidence. Those who had been the loudest in protestation of the colonel's innocence acknowledged they were wrong and humbly apologized to Old Jack for their conduct toward him.

In a few minutes Colonel Bland recovered from his unconsciousness and started up in partial bewilderment; but he soon took in his situation, and when he found that he had been entrapped, his spirit and courage broke down and he began to beg for mercy. The villain acknowledged all—that he was Argus Eye, and responsible for all the deeds of robbery and for all the deaths in connection therewith. He exonerated Dashing Dan from a single act of outlawry, admitting that the existence of Dan's band, and his knowledge of his movements enabled him—Argus Eye—to operate more readily and with less danger.

As soon as David Stone had heard this confession, he took Prospect Pete aside and said:

"Pete, I'm goin' to Eagle Cliff; I must see Idyl and tell her all, for I know she believes me guilty, and I have a request to make of you. It is that you come over to the Cliff after you get through here and go with me to Deadwood."

"I'll do so, brother," replied Pete.

David Stone at once took his departure to the Cliff where he knew his sweetheart, Idyl Wynne, was brooding over a great sorrow. He moved along with a light heart and a lighter footstep. He had so many startling things to tell Idyl that his only fear was, that she would disbelieve him. In fact, there were few indeed who could believe that Colonel Bland was Argus Eye, and that Dashing Dan was not an outlaw. Nor was this the greatest secret of all that he had to break to Idyl—the secret that Dashing Dan was a woman!

Dave had nearly reached the cliff when suddenly three men sprung from behind a rock and with cocked revolvers leveled full upon his breast, cried out:

"Surrender! Drop them pistols!"

Taken thus by complete surprise there was no alternative but to comply. He saw the men were outlaws, and it occurred to him that they might not know of things at the Little Hurricane, and consequently he would stand some show for his life.

He dropped his revolvers at his feet and folded his arms across his breast. A look of despair was upon his face. This mishap in the very hour of his greatest triumph was enough to discourage the stoutest heart.

The outlaws seemed highly elated over his capture, and tying his hands behind his back hurried him away at a rapid walk. They seemed anxious about something, and David began to fear that their anxiety boded him danger. They pursued almost the same course that young Stone had traveled, but when two miles or three from the Little Hurricane, they turned to the right and entered a narrow canyon. They had not taken a dozen steps up this gorge when a lithe figure sprang out before them with a revolver in hand, shouting:

"Halt! Surrender or die!"

It was Prospect Pete, who, as he halted the party, pointed to the muzzles of a dozen rifles thrust through a fringe of dense shrubbery on the left.

The outlaws were taken as completely by surprise as they had taken David Stone, and a look of terror blanched their very faces.

"One of you attempt to draw a weep on and you'll be riddled," cried Pete, with the air of one conscious of his power; "a dozen deadly riflemen cover your craven hearts this holy minute, and unless you drop them weep on to onct and surrender, you'll be russed into dimmition in a gorgeous manner. Drap 'em!"

The outlaws dropped their weapons on the ground as though they had turned red hot. Pete advanced, cut David's bonds, picked up the revolvers and handed two of them to Stone and placed the others in his belt. Then, turning to the robbers, he said:

"Gents, I reckon you fellers recognize me as the little innocent you took to the Judgment Bar last night, and now if you have that paper in your hand you'll please disgorge, and I'll see 'bout that hidden mine."

One of the outlaws took the paper from his pocket and handed it to Pete, with a murderous scowl on his face.

"Give that, David, to Miss Idyl," Pete ordered, handing the paper over to his friend; "I am satisfied that the Little Hurricane is the Daniel Wynne discovery, and if so, Miss Idyl 'll lose her fortune unless the Boy Brigade gives it up."

"Ay, you forget David Stone is Superintendent of the Little Hurricane, Pete."

"And deeply in love 'ith Miss Idyl!" observed Pete with a smile. "Well, it 'll be all right, any way you fix it."

"Yes; but why don't your friends come out here?" asked David.

"What friends, Dave?"

"Why those behind them rifles whose muzzles are thrust through yonder fringe of bushes."

"There's not a man there," exclaimed Pete with a laugh.

A look of fury mounted to the faces of the cutwitted outlaws, and a fearful imprecation fell from their leader's lips.

"I found a robber deposit of stolen guns as I war comin' over here yesterday with Cap Gillhooly and them gals, and I hid 'em in that brush; and awhile ago when I see'd them honeysuckles comin' with you, I dodged back here and fixed up a masked battery and played the 'Great Jehovah and Continental Congress' in gorgeous style. I hate, awfully, to deceive folks older'n I be, but I see'd you rosebuds were the gentlemen that entertained me last night, and that you were the gents with the stolen paper. But, now gentlemen, since Argus Eye lies dead—"

"Dead?" exclaimed David.

Yes, died of internal hemorrhage five minutes after you left the Little Hurricane."

The three outlaws turned white as they exchanged glances.

"As I war goin' to say, gents of the mask, since your leader is dead, and half his band gone to keep him company in purgatory, you may go free on condition you skin out of this country faster'n a coyote. Remember, Prospect Pete's the hairpin that can be so gorgeously magnanimous with you, instead of blowin' your brains out as I'd ought to do."

Never did men look so humiliated and downcast as those three outlaws as they turned and slunk away—free men.

Prospect Pete and David Stone gathered up the rifles that had done such effective, silent duty, and concealed them, then the two turned in the direction of Eagle Cliff and moved away at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER XIV.

REVELATIONS.

On the second night following the capture, exposure and death of Captain Argus Eye, some four-score persons were gathered in one of the spacious halls of Deadwood. The leading and most influential men of the camp were there. The Boy Miners headed by Jack Drew, the detective, were there also. Prospect Pete, David Stone and the followers of Dashing Dan occupied front seats in the assembly. Dashing Dan, himself, was not there, and when inquiry was made for him, David Stone arose and said:

"My friends, you will never see Dashing Dan, as

such, again, and if you will bear with me a moment, I will explain the reason why. Three years ago, Arthur Clayton, an express messenger, and husband of Helen Carson Clayton, was murdered by road-agents near Cheyenne. The young widow was a woman possessed of great physical power and an indomitable will. She was a Western girl—had been born and reared among the dangers and excitement of the great wild West, and when her husband fell she registered a vow to avenge his death. She was then twenty-six years of age. She had two brothers Peter and David. Prospect is one and I the other. We joined her in her work of vengeance. She donned male attire and assumed the name of Dan Dashiell, and under that name she won the sobriquet of Dashing Dan. I took the name of David Stone—my real name being David Carson. As a female, she assumed the name Undine Blake, sister of Prospect Pete, and when not on the move or in the saddle, Dashing Dan relapsed into a quiet, domestic life of a female recluse. Prospect Pete and I have acted as scouts for Dashing Dan. I have kept my identity concealed under a disguise, and always have been at my sister's side when she was in the saddle, with but few exceptions. So you can all readily see why I have been taken for Dashing Dan. It is a wonderful family resemblance even to the color of our eyes. In size there is little difference—she being large for a woman, I rather small for a 'big' boy. This, gentlemen, is the whole secret of Dashing Dan."

This revelation was not new to the followers of Dashing Dan, for it had been divulged the day before to them, but to most of the citizens it was a startling surprise, and it was some time before some of them could credit the story.

Before the meeting broke up several thousand dollars had been subscribed for the brave young widow, her brothers David and Peter, and her followers, for their services against Argus Eye. Old Jack Drew was included among the number but he refused his share of the reward—requesting the committee to turn it over to the "gallant young widder, Dashin' Dan."

The old detective, however, came out full-handed, for, besides what he got of the stage and express lines for his invaluable service, he also won the bet that he made at the Stock Exchange the night he landed in Deadwood, and received a handsome present from Francis Gordon.

As no one had done more faithful and harder work than Prospect Pete, he received an extra present of a handsome rifle, which he declared was "gorgeous, by snakes!"

It was found that the Little Hurricane mine was located on the Daniel Wynne discovery. In fact, David Stone had mistrusted the location of the Wynne lode from the very day that Idyl had revealed her secret to him, and through fear that some one else would get wind of the existence of such a mine, he and the Boy Brigade took their claims there. It is true, the Brigade knew nothing of the Wynne lode, although at the time they struck the lode they discovered signs of its having been worked years before. Here David Stone admitted that he had worked a little deception on the boys, but they readily forgave him of it. It was well, however, that he did, for it turned out afterward that Idyl's secret, by some mysterious means, had reached the ear of Colonel Bland, who made every effort in his power not only to win her love, but to find the hidden paper and "jump" her father's claim. It was the gallant colonel, himself, who snatched the paper from Idyl's hand in the cavern that night, and turned it over to one of his followers for safe-keeping.

The meeting of the two bands that night in the cavern was unexpected. The robbers having failed, owing to Prospect Pete and Jack Drew, in abducting Miss Gordon that night at Eagle Cliff, they began a search for Idyl and Dolly whom they learned, from the two escaped, hand-cuffed outlaws that Drew had thwarted in their designs to carry off Irene and Mary, were absent from camp. The girls were finally discovered entering the cavern, and the outlaw chief, mistrusting something of the truth, shadowed them in the cavern.

The Boy Brigade offered to turn the Little Hurricane over to Idyl Wynne, but the maiden would not listen to the proposition for a moment.

"You have been to the trouble and expense of developing the lode," she said, "and it would be extremely ungrateful and selfish in me to claim it. I would never enjoy a dollar that came out of it."

The company, however, made her half owner in the mine, and from that day on the Little Hurricane became one of the best paying lodes in the district. Old Jack declared that, after all, Idyl possessed the largest interest of any one in the company, for besides her stock, she also was possessor of the brave and noble heart of David Carson, the Superintendent.

Prospect Pete still resides with his widowed sister, and continues his rambling through the hills on the alert for danger, for, even with the death of Argus Eye and so many of his men during the few eventful days and nights of which we have been writing, outlawry did not entirely cease in the Deadwood district of the Black Hills.

Aside from his meeting with his affianced, Irene Gordon, Captain Gillhooly was the worst beaten man that ever entered the hills. He had come with a flourish of trumpets as it were, to make a hero of himself by ridding the country of outlaws; but had had a constant struggle to keep himself out of outlaw hands from the day he entered the hills.

In fact, his expedition was a complete failure.

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